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THE STORY  
OF THE HOHENZOLLERN

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C. SHERIDAN JONES

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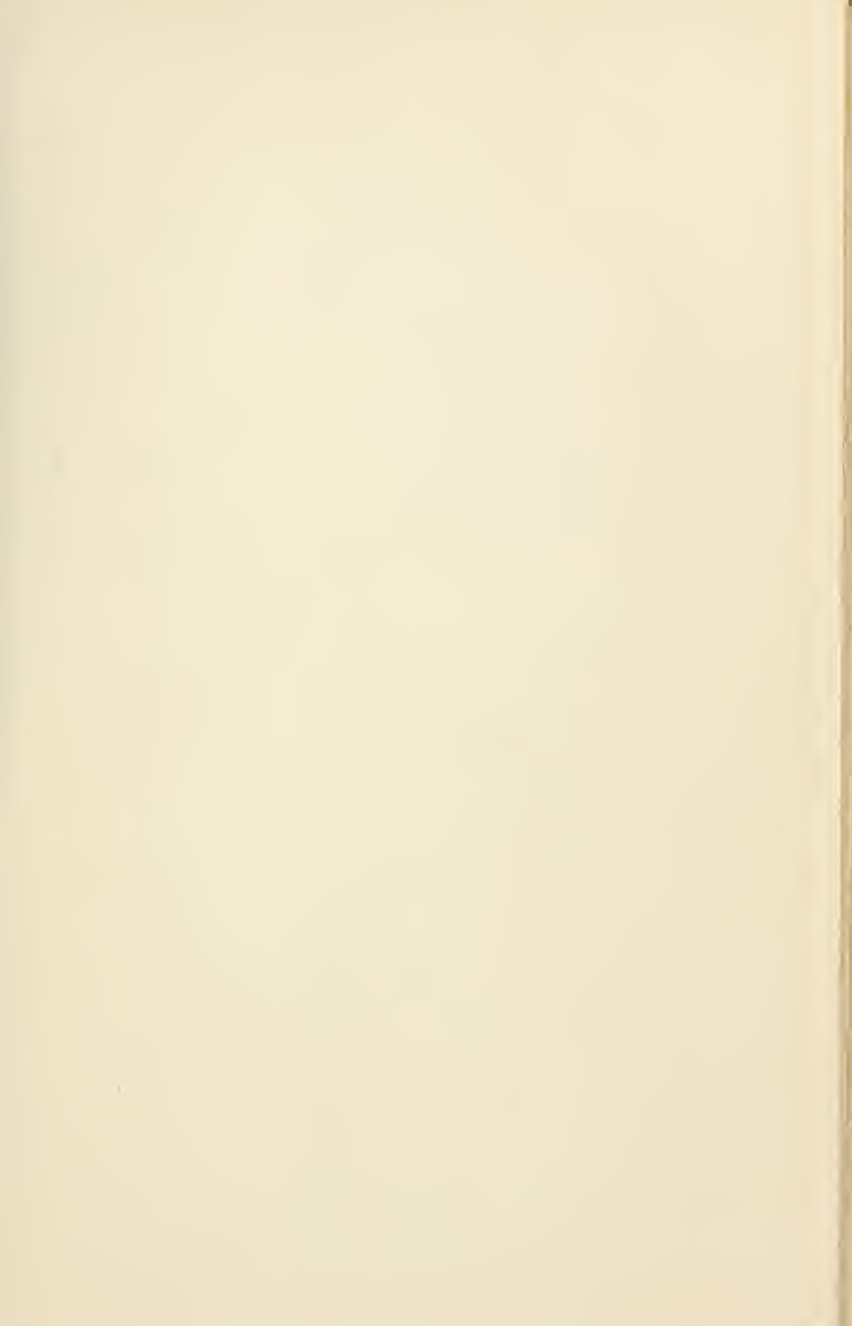






THE  
STORY OF THE HOHENZOLLERN







FREDERICK THE GREAT.

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*The Story of the*  
**HOHENZOLLERN**

By C. SHERIDAN JONES

*Author of "The Unspeakable Prussian,"  
"Sun Yat Sen and the Awakening of China"*

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# The Story of the Hohenzollern.

## CHAPTER I.

ONE of the most wearisome and pointless of the many pedantries that the heaviness of German Culture imposed on the free spirit of European literature was the habit of beginning the account of some interesting person or phenomenon *before* and not *at* the beginning. A biographer was supposed to open the life-story of his hero by noticing the leading traits, not of that worthy himself, but of his great-aunt; these, it was confidently assumed, would go far to explain away any paradoxes of character that the subsequent pages might reveal. One had, in fact, to assume that men would cease to be puzzling and contradictory if only we remembered that their ancestors were equally so, and that we were to be reconciled to

almost any abnormality in the subject provided that it had been detected in one of the grandparents. Similarly, we were never to read of an invention, unless there were recounted to us all the trials of the men who failed to encompass it; and the history of any race or family that attained to eminence was not complete unless the failure of previous generations "to arrive" was narrated in all its depressing detail. We may trust, I hope, that the discredit of German "Kultur," which is pretty certain to follow the defeat of German arms, will free our writers from the tedious task of raking the dustbins of history in order to discover some trace of the radium that the slime and shimmer of their subject holds. But be that so or not, I, for one, am going to turn over a new leaf.

My account of the Hohenzollern will commence with the time when they became of importance to Europe. I shall not seek to trace to its somewhat obscure and muddled source the origin of this strange, this sinister, family. Whether they came from the Colonnas of Rome, or the Colatos of Lombardy, or (as one is tempted to think seems more probable) they are in truth descended from a bear: that is a problem

I shall not vex my readers with. I shall not even trouble them with any account of Hohenzollern rule over that sterile and sandy waste that constituted the Marquisate of Brandenburg (ceded them in the fifteenth century by the Emperor Sigismund), to become in 1700 the Kingdom of Prussia. To do so would be valueless and tedious. We should have to relate the squalid details of petty territorial grabs and of grinding exactions from the impoverished peasantry of the district, set off with the same specious and grandiose justifications, the same preposterous pretensions that now, as then, marked the most arrogant, the meanest, and the most unscrupulous dynasty of Europe. And if that is not enough reason for my declining to dwell on the prehistoric side of the Hohenzollern, then we have it provided in the delightfully candid words of the greatest of the Hohenzollern, Frederick the Second, who, in the agreeable "Memoirs" that he bequeathed to his nephew, dealt thus with his forbears. He has been explaining that in the matter of taking kingdoms by stealth, and blushing to find it fame, it is as well not to be too particular.

"As for us, we are, most undoubtedly in that case. I see you blush at this. I

forgive you for once ; but let me advise you never to play the child so again. Remember, once for all, that, in matter of kingdoms, he catches them that can ; and that there is no wrong but in the case of being forced to return them.

“ The first of our ancestors, who acquired some rights of sovereignty over the country of which he was governor, was Tassillon, of Hohenzollern. The thirteenth of his descendants was Burgrave of Nuremberg ; the twenty-fifth of them was Elector of Brandenburg, and the thirty-seventh, King of Prussia. Our family, as well as all the others, has had its Achilles, its Ciceros, its Nestors, its drivellers and its drones, its mothers-in-law, and, without doubt, its women of gallantry. It has also often aggrandized itself by those kinds of right which are only known to princes at once in luck and in force enough to exert them ; for in the order of our successions we see those of convenience, or expectancy, and of protection.

“ From the time of Tassillon to that of the Great Elector we did little more than vegetate. We could, in the empire, reckon fifty princes in no point inferior to us ; and, properly speaking, we were but one of the branches of the great scone or chandelier

of the empire. William the Great, by the splendour of his actions, raised our family into pre-eminence ; and at length, in 1701 (the date, you see, is not a very ancient one), vanity placed a crown on the head of my grandfather ; and it is to this epoch that we ought to refer our true existence, since it put us into a condition of acting on the footing of kings, and of treating, upon terms of equality, with all the powers of the earth."

It will be agreed, I think, that the author of this delightful passage lacks nothing in those qualities of candour and frankness that always prove so delightful when a man is writing of his relatives. And here let it be set down that, hideous as the defects and horrible as are the crimes that can be laid against the soul of Frederick the Second—justly called the Great—of Prussia, hypocrisy in its worst form was not one of them. He may have lied, he did lie to other nations ; he may have lied, he did lie, to other men, whom he had to deceive because he could not coerce. But with himself, as these "Memoirs" clearly show, he was frank to the verge of cynicism. And as the views that he laid down and the policy he adumbrated became first that of Prussia and then

that of Germany, it is well worth our while to dip a little further into these "Memoirs," which are, truth to tell, exceedingly diverting. More than any other book will they help us to understand why Germany, once a great nation, has by slow degrees developed into the savage and deformed monstrosity that has outraged the conscience of mankind.

First, then, let us listen to the austere Frederick on Justice. He is under no illusions about that quality. In fact, very plainly he thinks it is a chimera:—

"Do not then, my dear nephew, suffer yourself to be dazzled with the word *justice*; it is a word that has different relations, and is susceptible of different constructions. These are the ideas that I annex to it:

"Justice is the image of God. Now, who can attain to such high perfection? Is it not more reasonable to give up so vain a project as that of an entire possession of her?"

Again, let us listen to his advice to that same nephew as to the true view of the whole duty of man:—

"I will now give up to you the knowledge of man, though at his expense. Believe me, he is always delivered up to his passions; vanity is at the bottom of all his thirst after



glory, and his virtues are all founded on his self-interest and ambition. Have you a mind to pass for a hero? Make boldly your approaches to crimes. Would you like to be thought virtuous? Learn to appear artfully what you are not."

And yet again:—

"If there is anything to be gained by being honest, let us be honest; if it is necessary to deceive, let us deceive."

Nothing could be franker; in saying, be as consummate a liar as possible he deserves at least attention, if only because of his obvious sincerity.

It is not very difficult to hear in the gospel thus shouted from the housetops the rustle of that "scrap of paper" which recently put Europe on the *qui vive*. And if we incline our ears to hear Frederick a little longer, we shall recognise other phrases and phases of thought that appear startlingly fresh to us after the events of the past six months. Take, for instance, His Majesty's observations on Politics:—

"Since it has been agreed among men that to cheat or deceive one's fellow-creatures is a mean and criminal action, there has been sought for, and invented, a term that might soften the appellation of the thing, and the

word which undoubtedly has been chosen for the purpose is *Politics*. Now, the word has only been found out in favour of sovereigns, because we cannot quite so decently be called rogues and rascals. But, be that as it may, this is what I think as to *politics*. I understand then, by this word, dear nephew, that we are ever to try to cheat others. It is the way to have the advantage, or, at least, to be on a footing with the rest of mankind. For you may rest persuaded that all the states of the world run the same career. Now this principle being once settled, never be ashamed of making alliances, and of being yourself the only party that draws advantage from them. Do not commit the stupid fault of not abandoning them whenever it is your interest so to do ; and especially maintain vigorously this maxim, that stripping your neighbours is only to take away from them the means of doing you a mischief."

If we add to these reflections the fact that Frederick believed and believed only in force ; in the maintenance of an overwhelming, an invincible, army ; that he was supremely disdainful of anything like scruples, moral restraint, consideration for others ; that he thought honour a tiresome yoke ; above all,

that he believed that these things were mere empty delusions for deceiving the "slave" class, and must on no account be imposed on his own, *i.e.* the "master," class: we then realise that Nietzsche, Treitschke, and Bernhardi are mere echoes, more or less clearly defined, of that gospel of Frightfulness, which, though it has since obsessed a whole nation, actually had its origin in the disordered minds and poisoned imaginations of one single family of degenerates. It was the genius, the courage, the invincible energy of Frederick the Great that rendered possible this unparalleled phenomenon, and that spread broadcast through the people the virus of the Hohenzollern madness.

We shall come presently to the means he used to accomplish a task really without parallel in the history of nations. First, let us see how the greatness of his mind was warped to the acceptance of doctrines repellent to the soul of man.

It is distressingly obvious that the author of these delightful aphorisms was either a practical joker, who scarcely dared to hope that his admonitions would be taken seriously, or that he was morally colour-blind. As a matter of fact, Frederick the Great was

both. All through his life, as we shall come to see, he took a schoolboy's delight in inflicting humiliation, even upon those of whose acquaintance he was proudest. It might be said of him that he made friends with men only to affront and humiliate them. But this *diablerie* will not account for the "Memoirs," or their inhuman conclusions and revolting admissions. They are as sincere as they are shocking, and in so far as the man who put them down had a soul, their pages must be taken to have given it faithful expression. What he preached he practised. The maxims that he commends with sardonic solicitude to his successor are the maxims that guided him in his life, in his policy, in his mode of dealing with men, in his way of overcoming the ills that flesh is heir to. And they are, as I say, the maxims, not of a moral lunatic—of a man, that is, whose moral perceptions have become so warped and twisted that on one particular point he alarms and shocks us—they are the maxims of a man who had no moral perceptions at all; that is to say, of a man who, morally speaking, did not, in fact, exist. A man who affirms deliberately that both honesty and deceit are equally admirable, who is convinced of the impossi-

bility of determining whether an action is just or unjust, and who maintains that success, and success only, is the ultimate test of any action: of that man clearly it would be foolish to write with indignation or in heat. Morally he is as a blank sheet of paper. The ordinary perceptions that guide human beings in these matters—perceptions that may get blurred, that, at best, are faulty, and that are, of course, constantly overruled and ignored in practical actions, but that yet keep mankind within certain restraining limits—these do not apply in a case such as Frederick's. He was wholly oblivious to their power, blind to their significance; and that being so, we can afford, I think, to examine him as a curiosity, an abnormal prodigy that it is quite idle to denounce, but very well worth while to look at under the microscope.

So far as I know, there has only been one serious attempt to explain the perversity that undoubtedly marks Frederick off from nearly all the sons of Adam of whom we have any record. That attempt is delightfully ingenious, but, as it seems to me, ludicrously inadequate. Frederick, it is suggested, was a moral abnormality, simply and solely because he was not a believer

in revealed religion, being, in fact, a free-thinker. It is very easy to refute this view, and to refute it without entering on any of those barren and dispiriting controversies that have centred round that once disquieting but now respectable name. To do so we have only to contrast Frederick's *obiter dicta* with that of any of the numerous leaders of the school of free thought. They have been many, some of them as distinguished as they were diverse; and they differed almost as furiously amongst themselves as with the orthodox. But the point is that in none of the controversies in which they indulged did they ever adumbrate doctrines remotely resembling those that I have instanced. The late Mr. John Stuart Mill was, if I may be permitted the expression, born and bred a sceptic, but no one can imagine him insisting upon the relative unimportance of honesty and deceit. Professor Huxley, that doughty champion of Agnosticism, would have turned in his grave at the mere suggestion; and did not Jeremy Bentham, so far from concluding that morals had no existence, take considerable pains to establish a new moral system of his own—a system that may prove in practice as impossible as Frederick's denials, but which clearly shows

that Jeremy believed profoundly that "morality is part of the nature of things." I could give innumerable other instances from Lucretius to Professor Bain, or, if it be preferred, to Dr. Stanton Coit. But *cui bono*? On the face of it, whatever sins of commission may be charged against free thought, this, at least, is certain, that its advocates would have shrunk from these negations and denials of man with the same mingled perplexity and amazement with which we regard them to-day. They, at all events, were normal men, with a sense of justice and of right and wrong. Frederick was not normal, and he grew up unencumbered by any such considerations; and when we come to reflect on what that upbringing consisted, it must be confessed that our astonishment is likely to be greatly diminished.

Frederick the Great was the son, so the Encyclopædias tell us, of Frederick William the First, son of the first King of Prussia, grandson of the Great Elector, of whom later we shall have something to say. He was called "Fat William," and he was as original a character as, I suppose, there is to be met in history; and as he may be considered, now that he is dead, almost as diverting as



he was undoubtedly unique, it will be worth our while to devote a considerable amount of our space to his engaging personality.

Frederick William the First—"Fat William"—was not a pleasant person to live with. In the first place, he was mean to the point of insanity—so mean, in fact, that his children could not get enough to eat at the royal table; and almost the first taste of the irony of things that the youthful Frederick was made to experience was that to be the son of a king did not protect him against food for serving which a Pomeranian peasant would have soundly beaten his wife. Sour cabbage and stale bread, these were the dishes that Fat William delighted to inflict upon his sons and daughters, who went away from the ordeal of their meals famished and nauseated. You will say that they might have protested. That would have earned them only a whipping. For Fat William was not merely mean, he was tyrannical and despotic to such an extent that the whole of his subjects, let alone his household, passed their lives in mortal terror of the old gentleman, whose power was purely arbitrary, and who made that power felt with an iron hand. The cook, himself an underpaid starveling, was forbidden to make



the most trifling addition to the wretched rations that the royal head served out to his unfortunate family. Death was to be the penalty for any relaxation on the part of the unfortunate *chef*, who sought release from the hideous servitude into which he had been trapped. In fact, so insistent was Fat William on the point that he laid down in one of those ludicrous decrees that he perpetrated from time to time that "this regulation was to be kept after his demise," though, as by that time his family and servants would have been released from the terror of his displeasure, as he could no longer have them caned or confined to a "palace," it is by no means clear how he could still make his royal wishes obeyed.

But "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Fat William beat the cook and threatened him with death, and his table, or rather those sitting at it, groaned under the sparseness of his feasts. Once, it is alleged, he raved and stormed at his sorely tried wife because, recovering from an afternoon doze, he instantly demanded the current price of eggs, and she, poor lady, could not tell him. A violent scene ensued. The Queen of Prussia was made to weep, to sob, to entreat forgiveness. The servants were catechized

and examined upon the point, and threatened with all sorts of pains and penalties. Terror reigned in the royal household, and the viands next day, one imagines, were more than ever like prison fare, and the wife and daughters of the royal miser more than usually solicitous that they should not be betrayed into any involuntary quiver of disappointment or disgust, or show by any outward and visible sign the inward tortures they were suffering. One can see them bravely trying to rejoice, those Princes and Princesses of the House of Brandenburg, bravely trying to affect a cheery glow over the sour cabbage or accepting with suppressed shudders the hard and mouldy bread that their royal parent insisted on their swallowing. The very cooks and scullions were forbidden to taste the food they were preparing, lest its meagre quantity should not leave enough for their royal masters.

Once when a friend sought to relieve the sparsity of the table by a gift of oysters (what pleasures it must have aroused among the hungry Hohenzollern!), Fat William disappointed them by selling the barrel, and one can hear the chuckle with which he pocketed the money, and thereby condemned his family to another week of semi-starvation. The very

game which the old rascal—he was an inveterate hunter—“bagged” he sold, and thus secured the dual delight of knowing that his family still went short and of adding to that hoard of riches which was his principal delight in life.

It is distinctly interesting to note that this agreeable gentleman, all of the olden school, did not condescend to do anything so vulgar as shopkeeping to get rid of the wild boar that he killed. He knew a trick worth two of that. He compelled—there is really no other word for it—he compelled the officers, nobles, and burghers to accept the spoils of his gun and spear, and very thoughtfully he fixed the price at which they were to buy. When he found that some of the poorer among these (for Prussia was then wretchedly poor) could not possibly pay, even if they purchased these trophies of his skill, he bethought him of the Jews. They, at least, had money; they, at least, had treasure. And obediently the sons of Levi purchased of their royal master the impure flesh that they were forbidden to eat! In the year of grace 1724 alone the Jews of Berlin were compelled to buy from Fat William no less than two hundred head of wild boar in a single batch, and to pay

for them through the nose—in their case no light matter, we may be sure !

One may suppose that Fat William had the less scruple in enforcing this pleasantry upon his subjects, in that he himself did not spare his own royal person. He spent on himself, as on his court, as little as possible. If his children were ill-fed and ill-dressed, so was he. All the year and every year he wore the same rusty blue coat of thick, hard cloth. Only when it was in rags did he discard it—to have it sent, by a fine stroke of irony, to the home for old soldiers which he patronised. First, however, it must be stripped of the coroneted buttons of the House of Hohenzollern. It would never do to tax his privy purse with the expense of making new ones. And, in fact, these very buttons were made to last through the old skinflint's reign.

But these are feeble indications of the parsimony that obsessed the soul of the man who was to mould, through his son Frederick, the future destiny of Prussia. His ambassadors, clad almost literally in rags, became the laughing-stock of the foreign courts, where they represented the monarch who had achieved notoriety as the meanest occupant of a throne in the whole annals

of Europe. There is a story extant of one of his ministers, called Luicius, who dared to add to his miserably inadequate allowance by cutting down some trees in the garden of his residence, on which Prussia had a claim, as indeed she had on almost everything! Fat William, furious at the loss of possible revenue to the princely House of Hohenzollern, stopped the poor man's wretched pay for one year. Faced with sheer starvation, poor Luicius determined to end his life, and did in fact attempt suicide, being rescued by a faithful henchman—whom he never forgave!

As abroad, so at home. No Chinese mandarin at the most corrupt period of the Manchu despotism ever imposed exactions more cruel and flagrant than those by which Fat William bled white his faithful subjects. All sorts and conditions of men and women were made to feel the pinch of his extortions. Baroness Kinpausen, the richest widow in Berlin, was detected after two years of single blessedness in an amour with one of her admirers—an amour that resulted in the birth of a new subject to the King of Prussia. That austere monarch was horrified. Anticipating the doctrine set up some century and a half later by Paul Kruger, he demanded satisfaction

from the Baroness for the “moral and intellectual damage” that she had done to the State, and—got it from her to the tune of £30,000. Others, blameless even of such a human indiscretion as the merry widow aforesaid, were made to feel the weight of William’s heavy hand. The nobles found themselves confronted at an early stage in his career with a scheme for the compulsory purchase of their lands, to which they assented, partly through fear, partly in the hope that they would receive a good round sum for the pitiful sandy wastes that for the most part constituted their estates. But Fat William knew a trick worth two of that. He paid them strictly the market value of the land he confiscated—that is to say, he paid them next to nothing; and then, from the farmers and cultivators to whom he entrusted the improvements, he exacted remorselessly the increased value of their own exertions. So efficaciously did he turn the screw, and so thoroughly did he suck the orange dry, that during the twenty-eight years of his happy reign he extorted from his famished, broken, and impoverished subjects the respectable sum of 9,000,000 thalers, which he thoughtfully stored in iron-hooped barrels in the vaults of his

palace : that palace where he ruled everyone with a rod of iron, from his unfortunate, terror-stricken Queen down to the lean and hungry scullion.

For Fat William was not only mean, grasping, avaricious : " He was," says Macaulay, " hard and bad, and the habit of exercising arbitrary power had made him frightfully savage. His rage constantly vented itself to right and left in curses and blows." When, as sometimes happened, the dear old gentleman was afflicted with the gout, and was reduced to an invalid's chair, the servants had instructions to pursue those of his family whom he wished to chastise; and Princes and Princesses fled in terror from the old madman, who, with uplifted crutch and dire curse, still threatened them. Small wonder that Macaulay says " his palace was a hell and he the most execrable of fiends, a cross between Moloch and Puck." He was the despair of his wife, the dread of his daughter, and an object of the most unmeasured hate on the part of everyone who drew breath within the poisoned circle of his presence.

He was absurdly imperious, and absolutely tyrannical in small things as well as great, and he was consumed with an itching activity



that vented itself to the annoyance of all about him. One of the few recreations that he permitted himself was a "Tobacco Parliament," where of an evening he would talk scandal, drink beer, and smoke the cheapest tobacco with his cronies. Now, it happened one of these was not a smoker; the indulgence made him sick. But Fat William would not release him. For a long time he insisted on the nobleman smoking whether he liked it or not. Finally a compromise was arrived at. The fastidious Junker sucked an empty clay pipe, and his Majesty was mollified.

By a strange and dreadful irony, the creature whom he delighted chiefly to torture, to humiliate, and to affront was the one being on earth to whom it might have been expected that even he, the hardest, the cruellest, of men, would have softened. It was his first-begotten son, the heir of his kingdom, as one might have hoped the pride of his heart—Frederick, afterwards the Great, of Prussia!

I shall, I fear, have little, very little, to set down in these pages in favour of this Prince. A great General he was undoubtedly; within limits a wise and brilliant administrator, who spared his people at least the more insane and meaningless forms of cruelty

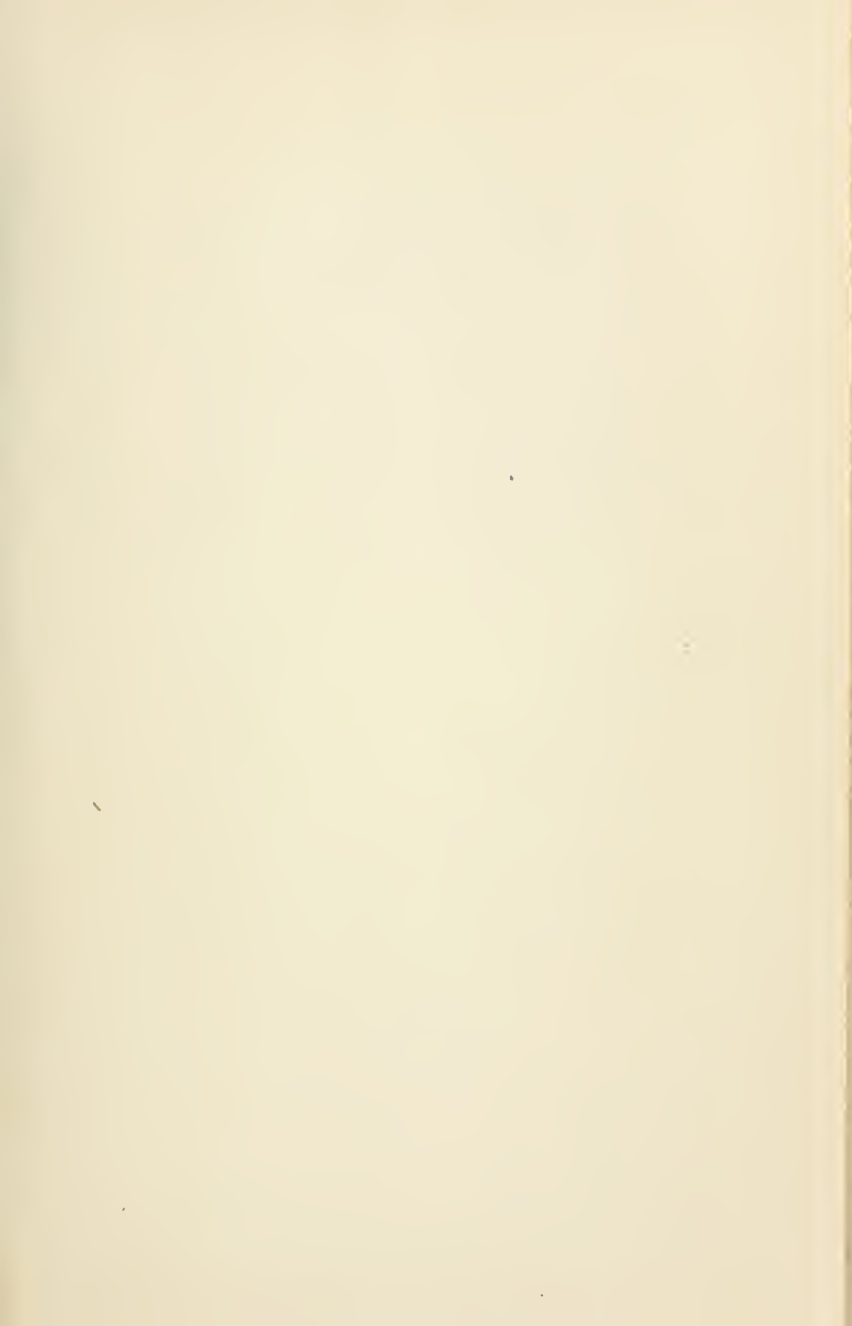


that had descended on his generation. But he was, as we have seen, a man devoid of conscience, of morals, indeed of scruple, who loved frequently to rejoice exuberantly in inhumanity. But let this fact at least be set down, not merely in his extenuation, but in his favour. His father hated him, hated him with a fury that years could not abate, with a fierceness that moved him frequently to frenzy; with a concentrated bitterness and rage that no other object quite excited in the selfish, gnarled heart of the tyrant. To inspire a hatred so intense as this in a nature so prone to cruelty and evil is some indication, we may take it, of a boyhood fresh, innocent, and ingenuous. Such a boyhood Frederick Prince of Prussia possessed. Of such a boyhood he was robbed by the father who gave him life, "and took from him all the inappreciable things that raise it from a state of conscious death."

Frederick loved music, and, less pardonably perhaps, delighted to discourse upon the flute. Fat William, whose savage breast was quite uncharmed by the strains, broke the flute over the lad's head and kicked him out of the room into the bargain. Poor Frederick loved literature, and used to pore

over books. Fat William threw them out of the window, and chased his son round the garden with the cane usually reserved for the meaner of his subjects. The boy was beaten, kicked, cuffed, insulted, and if his mother interfered punished all the more severely. Once his father tried to hang him with a bell rope. On other occasions he threatened him with execution. But worse than all the threats, the terror they induced, the insults, the humiliations, the abject and painful surrenders of self-respect that the mad old King exacted from the young man; worse than all was this: that every wholesome, every elevating, interest that the young Prince cherished, every natural instinct that he indulged, was stamped upon with brutal violence, crushed by torture out of his nature. "Oliver Twist in the parish workhouse, Smike at Dotheboys Hall," says Macaulay, "were petted children when compared with this wretched heir-apparent of a crown."

But even Smike, brutally treated, horribly fed, was allowed relaxations if he could find them. Even Oliver was permitted his dreams and phantasies. But Frederick was to be the victim of a *régime* that was to drive the iron into his very soul: to leave him no city of





FREDERICK WILLIAM, ELECTOR OF BRANDENBURG.

refuge from the grotesque *diablerie* of his demented father. Literature, music, philosophy—they were to be taboo to the young prince, and a moment of abstraction was to be punished by a blow, a generous speech by a thrashing. Fat William had a horror of these things—the horror of the Prussian who to-day breaks down the symbol of a faith he fears. He had a horror not merely of literature, but of learning. Says Macaulay:—

“‘My son,’ his Majesty wrote, ‘shall not learn Latin; and, more than that, I will not suffer anybody even to mention such a thing to me.’ One of the preceptors ventured to read the Golden Bull in the original with the Prince Royal. Frederick William entered the room and broke out in his usual kingly style.

“‘Rascal, what are you at there?’

“‘Please, your Majesty,’ answered the preceptor, ‘I was explaining the Golden Bull to his Royal Highness.’

“‘I’ll Golden Bull you, you rascal!’ roared his Majesty of Prussia. Up went the king’s cane: away ran the terrified instructor, and Frederick’s classical studies ended for ever.”

But it was not by such means only that Frederick William the First turned his eldest son from a high-spirited and rather romantic, if self-willed youth, with a taste for speculative philosophy and *belles lettres*, into something at once more and less than a man.

Young Frederick soon found something more stimulating than the flute he was compelled to play in secret, more interesting than the works of the French philosophers, though these had for him all the fascination that forbidden fruit possesses for youth. He committed a new sin in his father's eyes—this time an unpardonable one. He did what thousands of youths have done before, and will continue to do, one fears, so long as this round world of ours still goes spinning on its old unchanging way. Frederick fell in love—in love with a lady who had nothing to recommend her but her charm and her innocence. These, one would think, must have been considerable; for they inspired in the mind of the young prince the one pure, not to say natural, passion that he ever experienced in his life: a passion that stands out from the unspeakable perversions, the nameless depravities that later stained his soul. For that very reason (it is with

deliberation that I write the words) it was all the more repellent to his own unnatural father.

Doris, the name of Frederick's *inamorata*, was the daughter of a schoolmaster at Potsdam, who like Werther's Charlotte delighted to play the clavecin. Of an evening she would discourse sweet music to the prince, who, bored to death with the perpetual drill to which his days were devoted, looked forward to these golden moments with the strained expectancy of a man whose leaden life gives him nothing else to hope for. Sometimes the prince would accompany Doris on his flute, and the lady's father would beat time for the happy duettists, the while he dreamed strange dreams of his daughter's destiny. It is a pretty picture this—one of the very few that Frederick's life affords. But it was soon to be spoilt. Fat William's spies brought news to their master of the "depravity" of his son. The old tyrant was furious. The next night a new factor disturbed the harmony of the musical evening at the schoolmaster's. The King himself was present! He raved, he stormed, he cursed, he swore. He threatened Frederick and he threatened the girl, not only with his own royal displeasure but with the wrath



of the Almighty, on whom the poor madman thought he had a special claim. It will be seen that he was, in fact, a true Hohenzollern. And if that fact has not already been made clear, I shall have but to set this down: that the poor girl was beaten one night through the streets of Potsdam and condemned to spend three years in a prison in the town.

That, for the woman, was the vengeance exacted by this most agreeable of monarchs for what at best was a harmless flirtation, at worst a very pardonable liaison. The woman was first publicly insulted, then imprisoned. That done, Fat William was free to devote the whole of his energies to the chastening of his eldest son. The palace had long been repellent to Frederick; it now became unbearable! There is, as we shall see, a sinister and dreadful significance about the fact that this little love affair of the young prince did more to inflame his father against him than any of his previous transgressions—including even the ungodly flute and the dreadful French philosophers! In fact, it marked a turning-point in the persecution of Frederick by his father. Hitherto the demented old miser had not troubled to discriminate overmuch between his



children. They had all been placed on an equality of the most depressing description, being kicked, cuffed, insulted, and ill-fed with uniform thoroughness and ill-will. But there opened to Frederick a new and more repellent phase of his father's perversity.

Even injustice, strange to say, is easier to bear, when it is, if I may be permitted the paradox, equitably distributed and impartially administered. It is some consolation, after all, to know that if your own head has been broken, your brother's shins are barked, that if you yourself are starved, your *vis-à-vis* is in no better case, and can sympathise with you as you can with him. But even this solace was soon denied to Frederick. The affair of the schoolmaster's daughter marked a new epoch in his wretched life. Henceforth Fat William singled him out for special, for supreme, malignity, and entered on a deliberate course of torture, all the more unbearable because it was not intended to be borne.

Just as the parental malevolence found special expression as regards poor Frederick, so was the parental wrath tempered to his brother Henry. Henry was given enough

to eat, was not publicly affronted, and was beaten and struck only on comparatively rare occasions. In other words, Henry became the apple of his father's eye, while so cordially did that father hate Frederick that the sight of the boy was sufficient to send him into transports of rage. It seems, indeed, that the more Fat William got to love Henry, the more cordially did he detest Frederick. Perhaps his was a nature that was only capable of affection when inspired by animosity. However that may be, this much is certain: following on the episode of the schoolmaster's daughter, Fat William did everything he could to extort from his eldest son a renunciation of his right of succession in favour of his brother Henry, and when persuasion proved in vain, other means were adopted.

It was then that young Frederick gave evidence of those qualities of unfaltering resolution, of almost inhuman endurance, which at a later period were to carry him so far. Had there been a trace of weakness in him, had not his nature, then young, fresh, and unspoilt, not also been one of uncommon tenacity, inevitably he would have succumbed to the dreadful *régime* to which he was now subjected. The King first

demanded, then besought, his abdication, and every day he sought to extort it—by threats, by bribes, even by torture. But the man who lived to lead his people through the horrors of the Seven Years' War was resolved to suffer everything rather than to forswear his patrimony; and his resolution was too strong for the wretch who clouded his days, but could not break his spirit. "Declare me a bastard if you choose," he said one day to his father, "then, of course, the throne goes to Henry. If not, it stays with me." The answer threw Fat William into a violent passion. He tried then and there to despatch his son, and would have done so if Frederick had not bellowed for help so energetically that the servants rushed in and interposed. Frederick, in fact, was too much for his father, and the cunning old wretch had to try other methods.

One day, after an unusually stormy altercation, he astounded the boy by speaking thus:

"I have had you beaten and insulted at least once every day this month. Had my father treated me thus, I should have long ago fled from his palace: so would you if you were a man—but you are not a

man. You have no courage. You are nothing but a coward."

It is not very difficult, of course, to imagine the effect of a speech like this upon a high-spirited, mettlesome youth, who hated alike his father and his daily life, and who needed only an excuse to escape from both. It is not difficult, of course, to surmise the effect it was intended to have! Young Frederick took the hint—as he was intended to take it. He planned with two friends to escape from the palace—as, of course, his father well knew that he would. A Jew lent him money—no doubt at William's instigation. The old monster saw in this attempt at flight a means of ridding himself for ever of his unfortunate son. Accordingly, he said nothing when his spies brought him stories of the young man's plans, and Frederick in his innocence felt himself secure.

Everything was arranged. The three friends had funds in plenty; they were to fly to England, and they anticipated joyfully the day when they should be free from the perpetual trammels and restraints of a court whose service was marked by insults and by blows, and whose honours spelt financial ruin to their recipients.

But William had made his plans also. No sooner had the chief fugitive mounted the horse provided for him than three Generals effected his arrest. He was seized, bound, and brought straight before the King, and there followed this remarkable dialogue :

“ Why did you wish to desert ? ”

“ Because you have not treated me like your son, but as your slave.”

“ Where were you going ? ”

Frederick made this cutting reply : “ To Algiers.”

“ Then you are nothing but a base deserter who has no sense of honour ? ”

“ I have as much as yourself, and I have only followed your advice.”

It is said that the King, to stop further disclosures, rushed on the lad with his drawn sword, but that a General of the Guard intervened to save him. Certain it is that William had resolved on Frederick's death. Certain it is, as any human conjecture can be, that the old reprobate had proposed and condoned the attempted escape for no other object than to rid himself of his son. Once let the boy be driven into desertion, he reasoned, and for that crime he could exact his life, and the throne could go to Henry ! Thus he had reasoned, and it

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looked indeed as if he were right. So on this occasion he satisfied himself by striking his heir-apparent across the face with a stick, and then had him committed to the fortress of Küstrin.

## CHAPTER II.

QUITE one of the most amusing of the many delightfully quaint superstitions that haunt the mind of the Hohenzollern is the modest notion that they derive their title to " the Ancient Crown of Prussia " direct from on High : in fact, that it was bestowed on them by Providence itself. The " Ancient Crown " aforesaid dates back to 1700, and so far as one can judge from the circumstances Providence had very little to do with its bestowal on this particular family, who none the less are supremely confident that they alone among the reigning sovereigns of Europe possess a supernatural basis for their claims. Time has proved quite powerless to modify this strange hereditary belief, which descends from generation to generation and from decade to decade, gathering strength and force as it rolls down the ages, till at last it has carried away with it a good half of the German people. Prince Bismarck



loudly and confidently asserted the doctrine, which is certainly no proof at all that he believed it, but a clear indication that he thought others did ; while in our time have we not lived to hear the Almighty congratulated on the magnificent way in which " He has supported the Kaiser " ?

To find the origin of this most stimulating belief, as to find the origin of most things Prussian, we must go back to Fat William. He it was who first boldly announced to his family and his people, those wretched victims of his perpetual ebullitions of ill-temper and parsimony, that God had placed him in a position of authority over them. Probably both his family and his subjects concurred in agreeing that if God had not done so, Satan certainly had. But outwardly they made haste to agree with the old gentleman, who was profoundly convinced as to the divine origin of his title. Now, it followed quite obviously on this belief that, not only could the King of Prussia do no wrong, but that whatever he wished to be done ought to be done without delay, since even the feeblest obstruction of his wishes was a flat denial of the Supreme Powers of the Universe whose instrument he felt himself to be. It is to this ardent



faith in his own supremacy that we must attribute much of the ill-suppressed rage and choler that darkened the last days of this urbane ruler. It is bad enough in all conscience to find one's will opposed in the ordinary way by untoward and perverse people, who happen not to agree with one. But when you are convinced that this opposition is disloyalty also to the powers that ultimately control the Universe, why then, quite naturally, one's wrath gets too great to be borne, and if it expresses itself in frequent canings, tortures, insults, and imprisonments, who can wonder? Providence, it is certain, rarely makes such a choice as the Hohenzollern for its rulers, and that clearly is all the more reason for respecting its decision.

Yet, strange to say, Fat William found that the decrees of Providence, as voiced by himself, were on occasion to encounter the very liveliest opposition: opposition even among the docile, well-regulated Prussians. Hitherto the old gentleman had had things pretty much his own way. He had drilled, and taxed, and coerced his subjects and bullied and insulted his ministers with a uniformity that had savoured almost of monotony. But now, strange to say, a change came o'er

the spirit of the scene. So far his royal will and pleasure had met with no denial. But now both were checked. The royal will at last was balked; the royal pleasure turned to grave annoyance. For, incredible and outrageous as it appeared, Fat William found that in the matter of the execution of his son all sorts of unexpected difficulties presented themselves. For the first time in his selfish, headlong career the autocrat of Prussia, the bully of his people, the bane of his family, learnt that there are things which even a king cannot be suffered to do, and this was one of them. In a word, he found it impossible to kill his son!

When young Frederick had been carted off to Küstrin (there to be confined in a narrow cell, lit by a skylight only), his father had rubbed his hands gleefully. The scaffold that was to polish off his heir would soon be erected. The wretch who had dared to oppose his wishes would ere long be underground. But, alas! the "best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley." Although Providence had bestowed the throne on Fat William's father, it had done so only on conditions—at least so the ministers made haste to point out to their royal master.

One condition was plain. The heir to the throne was inviolable! He, as well as William, shared the divinity that guards a king. An ordinary Prussian—some mundane peasant, or some low-born mechanic—such a one could be despatched at any moment that the King of Prussia graciously chose to indicate. But the King's own son—that was another matter. Even the most Supreme of all Supreme Highnesses—even he, lord of a mighty army, despot over a people—even he could not be suffered to slay his son; even his arm must be stayed when it attempted that crime; even his soul must be protected against that wickedness. And the ministers of the King of Prussia—poor caricatures of men for the most part, wretched shadows that the royal master bullied and threatened and menaced and confined—found heart of grace to tell the royal lunatic this, and, what is more remarkable still, they made him listen to their warning. He stormed, he raved, he cursed, he swore. But the ministers were adamant. To defy them and to outrage public decency by the execution of his son might have involved a revolution. Fat William temporised, and for the moment Prince Frederick was out of danger.

His father was mortified beyond expression, and in the extremity of his grief took to bed, where he consoled himself by giving orders that the young prince should be made as uncomfortable as possible, and his associates captured [with all possible speed. His family, one fears, must have had a somewhat trying time with him. His daughter, who had some part in her brother's escape, was beaten and maligned before the servants of the royal household: beaten with such violence that years later, when she showed her shoulder to Voltaire, the mark of the royal displeasure was still upon it, while as for the Queen, her mother—though quite guiltless in the matter—William terrorised her so that she swooned away three or four times in an hour. His daughter has left us in her memoirs a vivid account of one of the scenes that occurred with him on an average twice every hour: "The Queen was crying and wringing her hands. My sisters were kneeling at my father's feet—even our little tiny sister of three years old—all sobbing bitterly. Madame von Konnken and Mademoiselle von Sonnsfield stood there pale as death, unable to speak, and I—I was in the very depths of despair. . . My father now

said that my brother was not dead, but that 'by all the holy angels' he would kill him!" Then he abused all and sundry. It was a dreadful ordeal for the wretched Hohenzollern, who must have begun to think that there are worse horrors than the scaffold, and to long for the comparative quiet and freedom of Küstrin.

But "time and the hour run through the roughest day." One morning Fat William astonished his household by exhibiting signs of comparative cheerfulness. No one was beaten, or insulted, or threatened with imprisonment, or driven from the table. The reason was not far to seek. William had thought of a new way of putting his son to death, and his hilarity knew no bounds. He had hit on a plan of delightful simplicity. Though Frederick was the heir to the throne, and as such inviolable, he was also colonel of a regiment of dragoons. No such inviolability attached to him in that respect. The Prince could not be killed, but—the Colonel could be court-martialled and summarily dealt with. Only one power in the realm could interfere with the sentence that the court-martial passed. That power was himself, the King! It was a beautiful scheme, and Fat William breathed again.

If there were not a scaffold for Frederick to ascend, at least there should be a firing party to take his dear son out ; and already the King's justice saw Henry established on the throne and his rebellious son buried as a traitor. Instantly he proceeded to summon the court-martial, *alias* the Council of War, and gleefully prepared himself for his son's obsequies.

William had not the slightest doubt, not the least misgiving, but that the Council of War would make short work of the Prince and condemn him to death with all speed. Clearly it was their duty to do so. Their King, being appointed by Divine sanction, and being the special instrument of the Divine will, it was unthinkable that his Generals should oppose his wishes in the matter. For a sovereign so appointed and sustained not to be able to despatch his son at his own royal pleasure—why, the thing was too incredible to bear thinking of, and accordingly William summoned the Council without any close scrutiny of names or any choice of personnel. All the Generals would meet his wishes in the matter, and any of them would be good enough or bad enough to condemn his wretched son. Now, as it happened, this was a mistake. For amongst



those who were ordered to take part in the business was a certain Prince Anhalt, an old-fashioned, downright sort of cavalryman, who found the proceedings very little to his liking. In fact, so grievously hurtful did they prove to his soul that just before the vote was taken Anhalt threw down his sword with peculiar emphasis, and announced in a tone that was quite unmistakable that anyone declaring against young Frederick would have to settle there and then with himself! Here was a dilemma for the august judges. On the one hand was the dreadful displeasure of the dreaded King, who, *capable de tout* might inflict any punishment, exact any vengeance from them; on the other was old Anhalt, who would assuredly require them to give him the pleasure of a *tête-à-tête* with the sword in the quadrangle outside. They hesitated; then they looked again at Anhalt's flashing eye and upright figure. After that they hesitated no longer. Frederick was unanimously acquitted, amid open rejoicings, and William, whose rage and violence knew no bounds, gave his family another pleasant week-end, from which we may be sure they were not very quick in recovering.

But what, after all, was a court-martial

to the King of Prussia ? Fat William was not the man to let any tribunal so flimsy as that, or for the matter of that any tribunal whatever, stand between him and his wishes. Judges, magistrates, juries, and all the rest of them—they existed only for one purpose, that of enforcing his wishes and behests. If they failed to do that, why, then, obviously they failed to carry out their proper function—and let them be *anathema* ! To a divinely appointed despot things are after all very simple, and Fat William, having shown his divine displeasure by cursing with unusual heartiness, simply had Frederick put back for trial by another Council—a Council which, this time, he was careful to select with the utmost circumspection, and whose members were told, kindly but firmly, that any failure on their part to return the requisite verdict would be followed by consequences of the most disastrous character. I do not know whether, had this threat proved unavailing, Fat William would have gone on calling “courts-martial” till he found one sufficiently venal to condemn his son, and whether, in that event, the German people would have proved sufficiently stolid and unimaginative to have patiently endured the farce. We are saved the trouble of speculating upon the



point, for on this occasion William succeeded. Frederick was condemned, and William went to bed that night a happy man !

And then it was that a new factor entered into the situation, and that a situation almost unique arose. Fat William found to his amazement that the opposition to the murder of his son had spread far and wide beyond his own dominions, that it had enlisted supporters too powerful for him to crush or to bully. He found, in a word, that Europe had intervened. The King of Poland protested against the horrible act that he contemplated. The King of Sweden threatened war, and the Austrian Emperor backed up the threat, and announced that only by the Imperial Diet could a German prince be tried ! The Dutch States joined in the chorus of remonstrance, till again William was forced to hesitate, and it seemed as if his hated son would after all escape the gallows. Then he bethought him of a new expedient. While the Kingdom of Prussia was, of course, then subject to Austria's suzerainty, " Old Prussia," a remoter part of his swampy dominions, was, he chose to assert, a sovereign independent State. He had there the right of seignorial justice, and could put his son to

death without let or hindrance. Once more his fatherly heart rejoiced: he gleefully prepared for the removal of Frederick, and I doubt not that another day or so would have seen the end of that unfortunate young man. But it happened that M. de Seckendorf, the Austrian ambassador, had received very definite instructions from his royal master, and he told William in language which admitted of no dispute that, seignorial justice or no seignorial justice, the execution of the eldest Prince of Prussia would be followed by war, and that the war would only cease when that kingdom had been reduced to the position of a province.

There is nothing more idle in historical retrospection than the habit of speculating on what consequences would have happened had things been otherwise. If one were not so thoroughly satisfied of that fact, it would be well worth our while to let our mind dwell on what would have been spared us had Fat William's courage been equal to his cruelty, and had he not incontinently surrendered to the Austrian threat. First of all, we should have been spared Prussia, then but a petty kingdom, scarcely recognised as a nation, but now the predominant

partner of the German Empire. There would have been little doubt as to the issue of the war ; little doubt but that the Prussian army would have been crushed by superior force, and once beaten we may be certain that the rest of Germany would never again have suffered her barbarity and pretensions. We should have been spared the horrors of the Seven Years' War, for Frederick the Great, its author, would never have lived to plunge the world into its horrors. The partition of Poland would never have been accomplished, the conscience of Europe would never have been darkened by that crime, and we should have been spared all the persecutions, all the horrors, all the dark evils that have flowed from the martyrdom of that unhappy land; spared, too, should we have been the great shadow of the German sword that for half a century has darkened Europe; and the growth of that huge and formidable military machine which has come within an ace of dominating Europe would have been smashed at its inception.

Probably—nay, almost certainly—this very war of 1914-15, with its millions of men and its vast expenditure, its unparalleled outpouring of men and treasure, would never have been waged if in 1730 old William had been just

a wee bit more purblind, just a trifle more insensate. But, as we shall come to see, there was method in the old man's madness. Prussia had only been a kingdom thirty years before she roused the conscience of Europe against her. Her King had just enough sense to give way, and by that means to perpetuate for Europe and for us the scourge which we are fighting to-day.

Fat William succumbed to the pressure of the Powers. He resigned himself to the continued existence of his son with as good a grace as possible, feeling no doubt that he had been very scurvily treated in the matter, and resolving still to be revenged.

And revenged the old tyrant was. If he could not kill his son outright, he could at least break his spirit and poison his soul. He set himself to do both. The first step he took was to arrest Frederick's chief accomplice, Lieutenant Katt, as, of course, he had a perfect right to do. Brought before the king, Katt was stripped of his Iron Cross, then struck with the royal cane till the blood flowed, and finally kicked to the ground; after which royal pleasantries, the unfortunate youth was committed to take his trial by court-martial, or Council of War, the proceedings being conducted by the same

well-disciplined officers who had already sentenced young Frederick to death.

Unquestionably it had been Fat William's wish that his son's accomplice should share his son's fate, and he had, there is very little doubt of it, issued pretty peremptory instructions. But even a Prussian General, like the worm, will turn. It was one thing to sentence the Crown Prince to death, for, after all, he had been the head and front of "the conspiracy"—a conspiracy whose only object, be it noted, was to escape for a while from the rule of Potsdam, and to live an ordinary human existence in some happier quarter of the globe. The members of the court-martial felt that after all one life would be sufficient expiation for so dreadful an offence. They sentenced Lieutenant Katt, therefore, to hard labour, and in fear and trembling showed the sentence to the King. Thus did their royal master comment on it, having first by the way struck out the sentence his court had passed :

"The Council of War named by the King has tried Lieutenant Katt and condemned him to hard labour, although he was *confessus et convictus* of *lèse majesté*. His Majesty cannot understand how such an extremely mild sentence could have been

passed on so terrible a crime. That shows him that he must not count on the fidelity of his officers. His Majesty has attended college and has learned Latin and knows the proverb : ' *Fiat justitia et pereat mundus.*' But, in order that in future should someone be guilty of a like crime, they will not be able to say : ' Since this one has been let off so lightly, the same thing must be done for them,' His Majesty finds himself obliged to pronounce the sentence, and to make an example of just justice, and although this criminal of His Majesty, Lieutenant Katt (particularly because he is among the officers of the army who ought to be faithful to His Majesty, and in particular to the body of gendarmes that has the special care of the life of His Majesty and the Royal Family), would only have what he deserves if one had him tortured with red-hot pincers and then hung ; His Majesty, out of regard for his family, and to mitigate his punishment, sentences him only to execution.

" Given at Berlin, the 2nd November, 1730."

Comment would spoil the rich, unconscious humour that peeps out at us from this manifesto. That a sovereign should actually praise himself for not torturing a criminal



with red-hot pincers, and should gravely point out the omission as an act of clemency, that, it will be admitted, is one of the most amusing pieces of self-revelation that history affords. Only a Prussian, only a man congenitally incapable, not merely of sympathy, compassion, and pity, but of humour also, could have penned that sentence at once so ludicrous and so infamous. William had none of these things. That "pedantic brutality," that solemn and, as it were, painstaking cruelty that we have seen displayed these last few months in Belgium and the North of France, with its calculated frightfulness and frigid unremitting tortures, these truly Prussian qualities were of the very nature of William. And he was to give proof of their remorseless wickedness in the manner of the execution of young Katt.

That tragedy was to take place at Küstrin under conditions as horrible and as depraving as the King could devise. The scene was to be staged so that young Frederick could never forget it—if, indeed, it did not drive him to suicide, as I suspect was intended. The day before the execution the unhappy young Prince was moved from his cell in the upper part of the prison to a room on the ground floor, looking out on a quadrangle.

In that quadrangle a scaffold was being erected. All night long he could hear the men fastening the planks together and could watch their busy forms silhouetted against the flare by which they worked. Yes, it was a scaffold they were putting up, and the story goes that young Frederick thought—who knows, perhaps he hoped?—that it was for him. But William's revenge was subtler. The scaffold was for poor Katt, and when the dawn came, cold and chill, Frederick was roused from sleep by four grenadiers, who took him to the window that he should see the last of his friend. By a master stroke of inhuman wickedness William had forced Katt to wear the uniform of the Prince himself, and had given orders that Frederick should be forced to look upon the execution of his friend. General Loepel held him and held his head, so that no detail of the ghastly scene should escape his tortured eyes. When he called out to Katt some words of gratitude and affection, they choked his speech. When he tried to avert his eyes, they would not let him. Twice he fainted before the act was consummated. But his tormentors had strict orders to spare him nothing. Even when his companion was dead they fixed the mutilated body on a platform oppo-



site his bed—for the insensate old King had conceived the idea of leaving his son alone with the corpse of his friend all day. They would have done it but for one thing. Frederick fell into a fit, and the governor took it on himself to suspend the torture.

### CHAPTER III.

AT first blush, the ungenerous reader will feel inclined to receive with lively incredulity any hint that he must begin to look for sane method in the very palpable madness of the old gentleman whose ways we have been describing. I am not surprised at this scepticism. The mere recital of the foibles of the old King does not itself suggest any deep-laid plan or far-seeing policy. We have all of us met choleric old tyrants, who burst into ungovernable furies with those about them, and expressed their dissatisfaction in torrents of abuse, varied occasionally by canings and chastisement. Gout, more than statecraft, decided them in this course of conduct, and if William the Second of Prussia was in actual fact worse than any of them, until he became, in fact, "a cross between Moloch and Puck"—to repeat Macaulay's classic phrase—that would be only because he had greater opportunities of making himself disagreeable

to other people, without any possibility of retaliation.

Yes; on a cursory consideration of William and his ways, it would seem as absurd to credit him with prescience or foresight as it would be to suggest that the late Mr. Daniel Quilp was, in fact, remarkable for his consummate but unrecognised powers of diplomacy. I am not sure, however, that the crafty old William did not cultivate the very *diablerie* which makes it so difficult for us to take him seriously, so as to deceive the Europe of his time. When we laugh at and over a man and his preposterous claims and monstrous exaggerations, we somehow fail to arm ourselves against all his possibilities of evil. There used to be, I believe, a rather agreeable mediæval conceit that the spell cast over one by a devil, acting either in *propria persona* or through the medium of some well-accredited witch, could have its power shivered to pieces by a laugh. They were simple folk, those of the Middle Ages, and they would have known that evil may be most dangerous when it comes to us in guise so ridiculous that we think we can laugh it away. We yield Fat William, in his chronic ill-temper, his insensate cruelty, his perfectly fiendish delight in inflicting

pain on others, we yield him to-day nothing but scornful, half-incredulous laughter.

That was the tribute that Europe paid his personality a century and a half ago. Europe thought him a nasty but harmless old man—harmless, that is, outside his own unfortunate dominions. And Europe was wrong—pardonably so, no doubt—but all the same, grievously. For had she looked at William's eccentricities a little closer, had she not dismissed him with a shrugging laugh, had she not accepted him as an unpleasant freak, she would have seen that behind all his insensate cruelties, his frenzied threats, his really ludicrous self-assertiveness, there was a carefully prepared plan, a deep-laid design : a plan and a design which if successful would change the whole atmosphere of Europe and banish peace, real peace, for many a long day. And I am going to suggest, that the plan and the design, which the Powers suffered to grow up under their very noses, has borne fruit in our own time—fruit whose bitterness we of this generation have tasted to the full. Fat William was, as we shall come to see, the real founder of that Prussian militarism which we are fighting to-day.

It is very easy to prove this. William had

an object in the parsimony which we have described. True, he was a miser, but he was a miser to an end. He wore an old coat and ate broken food, and stinted his family, and starved his cooks, and sold his game at exorbitant prices, partly, no doubt, for the pleasure of annoying those about him. But that was not the sole object. Outside the relaxation afforded him by annoying, first his family, and then his subjects, Fat William cherished an enthusiasm at once the most grotesque and the most sinister that ever sapped the mind of a ruler or drained the resources of an empire. Like Mrs. Wilfer he had a passion for big men—big men for his army, and it was to gratify this that he and his children and his wife were made to swallow nauseous food, and that the buttons of his uniform were made to last from year to year and from decade to decade.

Fat William's delight in tall soldiers, in fact, amounted to a monomania, on which the skinflint poured out his wealth with a lavish hand! The bibliophile who pays thousands for a rare edition, the millionaire who gives a fortune for an old master, the *virtuoso* whose wealth is spent on rare antiques—their hectic and intense delight in acquiring *chêfs d'œuvre* is as nothing

compared to the burning zeal, the quenchless ardour, with which Fat William sought to add outrageous specimens to the giants of the Prussian Guard. There was a monk called "Big Joseph": him William secured for 5,000 florins, paying 15,000 rixdollars besides as compensation to his monastery. An Italian, Andrea Capra, cost him 3,000 rixdollars. For a man of six feet, 1,000 ecus would be given cheerfully. The wretched and impoverished Prussian Ambassador in London extorted, so the legend says, no less than £64,000 for an Irishman seven feet high—paying himself, by the way, only half that amount for the prodigy. "There was no port, no city of Europe," says Macaulay, "that were free from the crimps of Frederick William." When money was useless this royal organiser of an international press-gang did not scruple to use other means. His gigantomachy, in fact, brought him over and over again to the very verge of war and employed thousands of agents all over the civilised world. "To be six foot tall in the days of King William," says a French writer, "was a veritable danger." Three feet more and a man's fate was sealed—it mattered not his rank or station. Once M. de Benterieder, of the Diplomatic Service,

was seized at the Halberstadt Gate. It needed not only all his protestations but the actual threat of hostilities to get William to release him. He was over six feet ! Others less exalted were kidnapped by William's agents with impunity. They were seized, garrotted, bound, and conveyed to Potsdam, there to be enrolled. Occasionally, if they were foreigners, even more barbarous means were used. The men were fed on salted herrings, and water was offered them—provided they signed into the service of King William ! Once a monastery was completely stripped and burnt to the ground because it had given sanctuary to one of the phenomena that Fat William was collecting. On another occasion the Berlin Museum was stripped of some of its choicest treasures to purchase from the King of Saxony half a dozen tall peasants that the King of Prussia was intent on adding to his monstrous regiment. The pirates of Barbary, the slave-raiders of the Soudan, did not practice methods more ruthless and infamous than those by which Fat William laid the foundations of the Prussian army.

And, be it noted, this practice of kidnapping giants was only part of the plan by which William hoped to create the most



formidable weapon in Europe. It says much both for the intrepid ignorance and for the utter ruthlessness of the man that he conceived the idea that, were his giants mated to females of corresponding height and physique, a new race of people would inhabit the earth: a race of perfectly Gargantuan proportions, whom there would be no resisting on equal terms. Prussia, we know, is the home of that strange superstition of a discredited materialism called "Eugenics," and we see in this reasoning of Fat William the first beginnings of that crude obsession, which from haunting the minds of uneducated Germans, next captured those of her purblind professors, and then spread by degrees over Europe.

There is a story of these modern empiricists which illustrates excellently well this delusion which began to gain ascendancy over Fat William. Two Eugenists, devoted to each other and to the uplifting of the human race entered during their pre-matrimonial days on a severe course of mental and physical discipline. Flesh foods were eschewed, a severe dietary enforced, only the most refined and ennobling authors permitted, and mere mundane conversational subjects were taboo. In course of time the new Paul and



Virginia married, and the nuptial feast, so it is on record, comprised no dish more piquant than lentils. Plain living and high thinking were the order of the day, and in course of time, when Virginia bore Paul a son, high hopes of the superman were entertained. But, alas! though one drives out nature with a pitchfork, she will return, and the child of the non-smoking, vegetarian, high-browed parents grew up with an ingrained taste for low society, and to rejoice wickedly in backing horses and drinking beer. Something very like this happened with William's giants. William, intent on the reproduction of the colossal, withdrew his army of spies and crimps from their pursuit of tall and formidable men, and instructed them to secure for his army suitable wives of like proportions.

Scenes very similar to those depicted for us by old masters in their "Rape of the Sabine Women" soon took place over Prussia: with the difference, of course, that we may take it the ladies thus decoyed were hardly the equal in charm or beauty of those whose distress Rubens depicts. William, in fact, gave strict orders that mere considerations of beauty were to weigh with their captors as little as the rights of the husband or the feelings of the woman. I

they saw a hefty wench they were to take her: that was all there was in it. A little later this first organiser of that human stud-farm which the Eugenists demand for the perfection of the human race saw that these subjects of his were sent to various warriors whom he had kidnapped, and both men and women, giants and giantesses, submitted with whatever grace they could.

I say this proceeding illustrates the colossal ignorance of Fat William, because it is quite clear that he indulged it, not merely out of *diablerie* or perverse wickedness, but in the firm and confident faith that the result of these unnatural unions would be a race of tall, vigorous, and physically splendid men and women. I think in this delusion we stumble on one of the cardinal fallacies that have reduced, not only the Eugenists, but the Prussians also, to impotence. We see the beginnings of that point of view which, originating with this ignorant but resolute and formidable ruler, has at length spread over Europe: the idea that man is a machine, who may be put to any task which his director (the "expert" beloved of the Fabian Society) conceives to be for the good of the race, and made to perform that task—even, be it noted, that of repro-

ducing his own kind cast in a certain selected mould. We see the beginnings of that negation of the individual, that denial of the human will, whose fulfilment is Prussia. We see, above all, that strange notion coming well to the front that a man can be made into a warrior, or, if you like, an efficient soldier, by being first cowed into a slave and then compelled to fight under the pressure of the "Frightfulness" that he in turn applies to others. We see all this, in fact, in the quaint views of that Eugenist, Fat William, and we see in him, as I think, the beginnings of that tyranny, whose name is Prussia, which we are fighting to-day.

That, at least, is how the matter appears to me, but perchance, like other commentators, I may err. One thing, however, is certain—Fat William's annoyance when he found that the babies produced by these enforced cultures did not answer his expectations. The babies were, in fact, quite of the ordinary size and weight, and they positively refused to take on huge proportions as they grew up to manhood. Like the child of the vegetarians dealt with above, they reverted to the average, as mankind always does and always will do. Fat William, of course, was incensed beyond measure by the discovery of this

trite fact. I cannot say how many canings were administered, nor what insults the mothers of the unhappy children were made to bear. There is no record of the stormings and ravings that the imperial palace was made to put up with, when it became apparent to this forerunner of Dr. Saleeby and Sidney Webb that his plans had miscarried.

Unlike these eminent supervisors of other people's morals, Fat William's language was not always of a strictly Fabian character, and while they would have expressed decorous regret that this "experiment in the practical determination of type had not approximated to success," King William would, and did, I fear, announce his displeasure at the result in language altogether different, and of a singularly bracing character. Whenever an infant grew up below the height and weight that the King regarded as the minimum for his soldiers of the Guard, we may take it a string of coarse expletives grated on the ear of his long-suffering wife, or terrified his unhappy children. The measurements of the latest offspring of the children of the Guard determined, in fact, the whole tone of the breakfast-table at Potsdam.

But methinks I hear at this stage a

question put by the judicious reader. "What sort of discipline," I hear him ask, "and practised on what sort of soldiers, was the *régime* that compelled them to embrace the spouses selected for their nuptials by their King and master?" To that my answer is very simple. Practically the discipline of Fat William's army was pretty much the same as that which now obtains in the Kaiser's forces; that is to say it was boorish, brutal, dehumanising, and terrifying to a degree, and was made so, not out of any conscious cruelty which desired pain and torture as an end in itself, still less as a result of carelessness and unconcern, but was achieved as a part of a deliberate plan, whose immediate aim was to cow and to terrorise the individual. Very thoroughly, very efficiently, was this done by the founder of the Prussian army, whom Europe despised merely as an insane collector of tall men. The soldiers were disciplined not like warriors, but like convicts. The drills were endless and exacting. The pay was wretched, the food execrable, the barrack accommodation worse actually than a prison. And for the slightest fault, the tiniest deviation from the complicated and ludicrous discipline, frightful penalties were

exacted. The King himself supervised these tortures.

There is a dreadful picture extant of him, cane in hand, marching up and down the lines of the grenadiers he had pressed into his service, striking one here, kicking another there, or making a third kneel before his august person while he "laid it on" over the head and shoulders with a right royal will. Yes, Fat William was the real founder of the great fighting machine which the Kaiser has flourished in the face of Europe, even as King William flourished his cane in the face of his army!

We know the Kaiser's view of his army. We have it in that immortal address of his to the Guards. "Children of the Guard," he said, "you are now my soldiers—mine, body and soul. You have sworn to obey all my commands; you must follow my rules and my advice without grumbling. It means that if I command you some day to fire upon your own relatives, your sisters and parents, perhaps, you must remember your oath!" There spoke the true Hohenzollern! It was that spirit—the spirit of resolute, determined, inexorable mastery—that animated Fat William and led to the foundation of Prussia and the Prussian army:



the army that came to consist very soon of automata, for it was impossible that men should serve in it.

There is a story of its delightful founder which illustrates very clearly what I mean. One day during parade Fat William, in a slightly worse temper than usual—perhaps the measurements of the children had been more than usually disappointing—was ranting and raving at his troops with quite exceptional vigour. Suddenly this fine old junker gentleman, all of the Prussian school, rushed up to a major, a grey-bearded old veteran, and struck him across his face. I suppose Fat William permitted himself that sort of rebuke whenever it came into his perverse and wicked head to do so, and as a rule nothing much followed the occurrence. But the veteran was a proud man, and wiping the blood from his face, he laid hands on the king's bridle. "Sire," he said, "you have dishonoured me. I must have satisfaction from you." And he drew two pistols. "For you, sire," he said, and he discharged its contents in the air; then, "For me, sire," and he blew out his brains.

They say that from that day forward Fat William struck no more officers. But personally I doubt it. I do not believe such

an incident would carry any weight with him or with any of the Hohenzollern. The imminent risk of being shot themselves, that indeed might weigh with this august family; but the spectacle of seeing others shot, would merely encourage them. Far more truly of the Hohenzollern might it be said than of the Bourbons that they forgot nothing and learnt nothing!

Indeed, if the suicide of his troops could have taught their cruel commander anything, Fat William had lessons enough in all conscience. "Suicide," says M. Paul de Saint Victor, "became an epidemic in the army," and that frame of mind was induced to which Prince Bismarck refers in his "Memoirs" when he stated that a Prussian officer would sooner go to his death than question the mandate of his superior officer! That, in fact, is the keynote of the Prussian military system. The privates are more afraid of their officers, and those officers are more afraid of their superiors, than they are of death itself. It is, of course, quite obvious that such a system has the very sharpest limitations—limitations which the present war has revealed. Under it you can, indeed, compel a certain degree of efficiency and bravery. You can compel a regiment, for



instance, to advance against a fortified position, and to certain destruction; but they will not advance in open formation, spread out so that their losses are comparatively slight. To do that you require troops capable of initiative and intelligence, qualities that the Prussian system of training by terrorism hardly permits. No; if you drive men forward by fear you must drive them along in those mass formations which resulted in the destruction of the Prussian Guard at St. Privat in 1870, and in the appalling and often purposeless slaughter that the present campaign has familiarised us with.

Troops trained by terrorism will shoot—but they will not aim: they will charge, but automatically, and they will succeed only when in overwhelming numerical superiority to the enemy and when led with a skill that he cannot command. In a word, they are certainly good as against Bazaine and the French organisation of 1870. As against Joffre and French in 1914 they are hardly so effective. They are the result not of training, enthusiasm, discipline, and that love of country which inspires men as nothing else can: they are the products of that terrorism which

Fat William applied nearly two hundred years ago, first to his family, then to his army, and then, as we shall presently see, to his whole people.

The shadow of Fat William is to-day over it all—over all the canings, floggings, tortures, insults, and “disciplines” which mark the Prussian army in the year of grace 1915. As it was in the beginning, so now. At Potsdam, in good King William’s glorious day, officials blew out their brains outside their royal master’s windows—for death was the only release from the ranks of the pressed army, nearly all of whom had been forced to serve, nearly all of whom were prepared to go almost to any lengths to escape.

Fat William, with characteristic shrewdness—for, insane wickedness despite, his was a cunning brain—contrived so to arrange his captured giants that each one spied upon and restrained the others. In battle array, on the march or parade, the youngest were put first: they in whom the desire for freedom was strongest. For, reasoned Fat William, if there were behind them men who had been already tamed and broken in, and if those men had definite orders what to do with anyone attempting to desert, why then the number of runaways from the ranks

would be comparatively small. And so old William's giants strutted along with never a foe in front (for the old gentleman took precious good care never to try the dangerous game of war with his favourite toys), but with a comrade armed behind, ready to shoot on the slightest appearance of any giant breaking loose. As someone has said, "Victims in front; gaolers behind." And over them all was the fear of the lash, in each of their ears was the threat of the torturer, at their hearts was a despondency that only suicide could end—suicide that, after all, was quicker and more merciful than the dreadful course of self-destruction into which they had been forced. Sang a modern poet of prison :

"Pale anguish keeps the prison gate,  
And the warder is Despair."

Dreadful enough, my masters, even of creatures convicted of grave, of foul offences, but of an army, of men bearing the proud name of soldiers, what can we say when we think of their being driven to such a frame of mind? We must ask Fat William's ghost : the ghost of the insensate old tyrant who first kidnapped his soldiers, then broke their spirit.

The discipline of any prison one has ever heard of is mild compared to his garrison regulations. The fatigue drills, the inordinate marches, the wretched accommodation, the merciless rigours of the semi-insane code that was inflicted on the men, these would have reduced the Manchu tyrants of China to envy and despair! As for the punishments, flogging, as I have pointed out, was rather the rule than the exception. If a soldier's spat-buttons were unfastened he was flogged; if a man faltered in drill he was flogged; if a man's uniform had not been properly brushed he was flogged. Discipline by the stick was the *môt d'ordre*, and brutishness and despair settled on the Prussian army. Have they ever left it, even to this day? If so, the accounts of their recent prowess do them grievous harm.

How did all this affect Europe—this raising of a huge army by a petty state that was scarcely acknowledged as a kingdom? Europe laughed at it. Just as she derided William's ragged ambassadors, so she laughed at his frenzied efforts to collect giants. What danger was to be expected from a state that could not pay her representatives the stipend of a curate? What harm

was to be anticipated from an army that admitted only men of six feet and over? His army was *opera bouffe*, organised to gratify the semi-insane whim of an erratic miser, who it was certain would never trouble the world's peace. In a word, Europe was too impressed by the obvious insanity that marked the antics of Fat William to note the method that lay concealed behind his rampant folly. Otherwise the sequel might have been different, and the King, who so stinted his representatives in foreign courts that they were unable to appear in a decent coat, and whose army seemed characteristic only of his own absurdity, could hardly have left his successor the fortune he had so painfully accumulated, and, what was of far greater importance, an army of 72,000 men, the most highly trained in the world.

Perhaps if the diplomatists had studied with any closeness Fat William's administrative methods they would have seen that, despite the choler, the rancour, the violence, and the spleen that marked out the elderly eccentric, he had, none the less, a mind of considerable vigour and insight. But who can wonder that this fact escaped them? Let me give another illustration of his utter insensibility to humour. The autocrat of all the

Prussias had decided that Berlin was populating itself too slowly, that it lacked distinction and *ton*, that, in a word, it needed an impetus which only he, from his royal palace, could give. Let us see how he set about the work. He planned and founded a new suburb of the capital (Dorotheenstadt), and announced to all and sundry that it was here that the fashionable, the really elect, as it were, would in future live. But the elect were coy and slow in moving. They, in fact, refused to respond to the suggestion, and Fat William's family had to spend many a *mauvais quart d'heure* with their lord and master, whose language, as I have pointed out, lacked nothing of the picturesque on occasion. As a rule, strong action followed this very lurid language, and the present instance was no exception to the rule. Determined to make Dorotheenstadt a fashionable quarter, whether the Berliners willed or not, Fat William issued an edict that convulsed Europe, and would have caused his capital to die of laughing had those stolid, submissive, and unimaginative Prussians possessed as much humour, say, as an ordinary swan. He announced in this edict that the best rooms in the old quarter of the town were to be reserved for



the officers in the army. The householders would either have to reside in the attics, or at the back, or if they liked he would arrange for them to have suitable accommodation in his brand-new suburb. And so the terrified residents of the old quarter were driven out almost at the very point of the bayonets of the incoming military, and repaired obediently to the King's new suburb to give it a fashionable appearance.

Was there ever a more characteristically Prussian absurdity perpetrated by the House of Hohenzollern? It ended, of course, in failure. These evicted tenants, compelled to squat against their will in fine streets and gracious squares, had none of the habits, none of the *empressement* that the King had fondly hoped to find them establish in the new quarter. But, nothing daunted, he issued a new edict. He reflected that one of the most marked features of the fashionable quarters of other capitals was the presence in its streets of fine equipages, brilliant carriages, smart coaches, and the like. But the wretched Berliners had, alas! few of these, and the mad old King looked and sighed and sighed in vain for the smart turn-outs that he had fondly hoped to see in his beloved Dorotheenstadt. But what the elect

of God had deigned to think was good must clearly come about. Let another edict be issued, and all would be well. He ordained that everyone who had a horse, everyone who had a cart, was to drive through the promenade of the new suburb between three and five o'clock on Sunday afternoon. The results were indescribable. The butcher's cart jostled the hearse; the hearse followed hard on a marquis's carriage, which was flanked by the draper's gig. And Sunday after Sunday the grave Berliners drove solemnly up and down, about and about, reflecting on the wisdom of their ruler and the greatness of their destiny. Only a man devoid of all sense of the ridiculous could have given such an order; only a people destitute of the same saving grace would have obeyed it. But to the end of Fat William's days the farce was stolidly enacted every Sunday, and it is not on record that anybody even laughed!

As with the Sunday promenade, so with all other matters, great and small, that happened within his realm. His ministers, judges, and officials were merely the cringing slaves of his will, who trembled so in the royal presence that they could scarcely falter out their obedience to his truculently



announced commands. There is on record a very characteristic example of his short and simple method with those dissenters whom he found in his service. By a strange caprice he became extravagantly fond of an adventurer named Echhard. After having made him a counsellor, he granted him a title of nobility, and honoured him with a decoration. The Electoral Chamber having dared to send a respectful deputation of protest to wait upon the King, received the following message: "The honourable Chamber is begged to keep its arguments to itself and not to interfere with the Honourable Echhard, or else we shall preside in person over the said Chamber with the help of a good stick." A significant pen-and-ink sketch by the King's own hand illustrated this gracious message; it represented a gallows with a victim suspended therefrom. Underneath were written these words: "Well-deserved reward for the Electoral Chamber."

Typical emblems these of Fat William: typical emblems of the Hohenzollern! The stick for immediate use: the gallows and the rack in reserve. So was Fat William's life passed. Children ran from him in the street. Women cowered as they stood aside

for him to pass, lest he should kick them. Strong men trembled lest they should be pressed for the army, where every soldier was turned into a slave. It is said he grew more gentle toward the last. Probably the number of torturings, floggings, and executions he ordered and enjoyed were less than previously, and some of his biographers have deduced that the old gentleman's powers failed towards the end. But I do not think that here lies the true explanation. The real fact as it seems to me is that he had achieved his object: he had made the Hohenzollern supreme in Prussia, and he made Prussia worth retaining for his dynasty. When he ascended to the throne the province was bankrupt: he left her clear of debt with a comfortable gold reserve. He saw to it that her agriculture was not neglected, and that the land was worked—on usurious and cruel terms, truly, but which were yet less ruinous to the country as a whole than sheer neglect. He caused the principal towns to be rebuilt, and on lines that were not ill-devised. Above all, he provided Prussia with an army that Europe was soon to learn was formidable indeed. To achieve all this he trampled ruthlessly on the conscience of his subjects, sacrificing their liberties and their lives

without a thought, using means that were odious and repulsive to a degree, when they were not ludicrous and contemptible. None the less his achievements outlive the methods to which he stooped. But to those achievements two others must be added: he broke and maimed the spirit of his people, even as he poisoned and perverted that of his successor.

## CHAPTER IV.

FREDERICK entered Küstrin at eighteen : entered it a mere boy—high-spirited, romantic, impetuous—with something more than a boy's love of music, philosophy, and *belles lettres*, and perhaps a good deal more tenacity of purpose and bitterness of spirit than it is good for a boy to have. It was three years before he left the agreeable retreat that his father had selected for his adolescence : three years in which, under circumstances more propitious than a jail can reasonably be expected to afford, he might have grown to manhood. But by one of those strange ironies in which history abounds manhood was just the very thing that Frederick the Great of Prussia was never to achieve. Throughout his life of dazzling triumphs and wondrous successes, manhood, in any really healthy sense of the word, always eluded him. Perhaps we ought not be surprised. Imprisonment in early life

has poisoned the character of many a poor man, and even a prince is not proof against its effects. In any case, Frederick left Küstrin embittered and soured for ever; with more than a man's "unconquerable will never to submit or yield": with less than a man's normal feelings or susceptibilities. His nature, in fact, had suffered a perversion, a twist, that was to run through it to the end.

It is true, of course, that in some respects Küstrin was a distinct improvement on Potsdam. Life, for all its monotony, had not the same terrors for the young Prince, who was spared, for instance, the daily assaults, canings, and menaces of his beloved father. Moreover, so far as food was concerned, the balance was distinctly in favour of the prison. Frederick found it possible to eat his dinner without being nauseated. After a time even the ungodly flute was permitted him; somewhat, we may imagine, to the annoyance of the gaolers who were always on guard day and night outside the Prince's cell. Soon, however, these were softened by judicious tips from Frederick's sister, the Princess Wilhelmina, and as time went on they became obliging, and at last positively friendly. On the whole, indeed,

Frederick might have been forgiven had he chosen to regard his imprisonment as an agreeable rest cure from the strain of the pleasantries of the Potsdam *régime*.

But man, it is written, does not live by bread alone, and especially does this hold good when the bread is made in a prison bakery. Frederick had lived to see his friend put to death before his eyes, and had been kept, not for weeks, but for months, in ignorance as to whether or no he was going to share his fate. He had been insulted, menaced, struck in the face, degraded before his inferiors. At first he had not been allowed to have even a light in his cell—save for two hours; and his expenditure was for some time limited to fourpence a day. The solitary hours that he passed in the wretched cell, outside of which his friend had perished, must have been full of bitter memories indeed. Mocking ghosts must have haunted it, cruel whispers of the past broken its unearthly silence. He might have sought relief in books, but these were denied him.

Fat William had ordered that no books should be permitted in his hands, and French—that language of gallantry and the emotions—was never to be heard from his lips! I do not know what fines or punishments his gaolers

had to insist on to see that the Prince observed this discipline. History has been decently reticent on the point. Perhaps they threatened him with the rack, or maybe even a dish from his father's table. I cannot say. But this much is certain: the Prince had no companions but his thoughts, and no thoughts but those of his own sufferings—the undeserved indignities, the cruelties, the merciless and inhuman system that had crushed everything of colour or of interest out of his young life, leaving him no friends, no solace, no hope, nothing but a bitter sense of wrong that oppressed his tortured, his exacerbated conscience. Under such a strain, men—strong men—have gone mad, and I am not sure that that did not happen to Frederick Prince of Prussia. That any sane person would write down the sentences that we may find recorded in his “Memoirs” is, to say the least, improbable. The only practical question, in fact, that remains to be determined on the hypothesis of their author's derangement is this: Was his malady due to heredity, or environment? Was it born in his racked and tortured brain, as he sat brooding in the prison cell at Küstrin, or did it come to him as a fatal inheritance from the mad old father whose



antics I have recorded? On the whole, I am inclined to accept the latter view, and I do so for a reason that, as our narrative proceeds, we shall find of peculiar interest.

Running through the august family of the Hohenzollern, down from Fat William himself to the present High and Mighty War-Lord, there is a vein of erotomania, which, taking first one form and then another, is invariably associated with insanity, either latent or acute. Now, in our old friend Fat William the mania in question took a form that later repeated itself in Frederick. Frederick's youth was not a bad youth—unless we hold that it is bad to make love to pretty women, to flirt and to philander with their affections, perhaps to engage these more firmly; to toast their names, and, let us trust, respect their confidence. But that, be it noted, was the Frederick of the ante-Küstrin period; and the Frederick who left Küstrin left it a very different being—left it to perpetrate some of the greatest crimes against humanity, and to confess in his own "Memoirs," under his own hand and seal, as we shall see, to charges that one would fain not bring against him.

Though Fat William graciously decided



to release his peccant son after three years semi-solitary confinement, he was by no means content that the young man should enjoy any of the freedom that one naturally associates with youth. He decided, indeed, that the Crown Prince should be married out of hand, and scarcely had the young prodigal escaped the rigours of imprisonment than his father peremptorily decided that the discipline of matrimony was essential. "If my son cannot be kept in jail at least let him be married." So the old gentleman reasoned. A princess of the House of Brunswick was selected, and the choice made known to the groom-elect. Time was, of course, when young Frederick would have resisted. Now he made scarcely any demur whatever. His reply to the royal command is bitterly eloquent of the change that Küstrin had worked in the spirit of the lad who had once dared his father to disinherit or to harm him, and who had obstinately refused to surrender even his flute, let alone his opinions! Now his choice of a wife was at stake, but he did not care. "There will be one more unhappy princess in the world," he remarked; and in that spirit, so propitiatory and encouraging in a husband, he led to the altar Princess Elizabeth

of Brunswick-Bevan, the lady with whom he subsequently resided at Rheinsberg. Frederick, I am bound to say, does not seem to have made even the very faintest pretence to any sympathy, let alone affection, towards the lady he had espoused. His view of her was stated with charming frankness. "I shall put her away as soon as I am master," he used to say. "I will keep my word. I will marry, but that is enough. *Bon jour, Madame, et bon chemin !*"

These are strange words for even the most cynical of husbands to employ, but that they were sincere and exactly expressive of the personality of the man the facts establish beyond doubt. If Fat William imagined that the marriage would, in any way, restrain young Frederick from having his head, then he lived to be grievously disappointed. For the alliance was of the most purely formal description. Frederick shared at Rheinsberg the same castle as his wife, but he never lived with her. There were no children by the marriage—none were ever born to him. Nor had the princess any rivals in other women. The fact is that since the days of that early romantic Potsdam attachment Frederick's nature had suffered one of those perversions,

as permanent as repellent, from which the soul of a man never recovers : a perversion that is made terribly clear to us in his own words—words addressed, be it noted, as counsel and warning, to his favourite nephew, just on the threshold of life :

“ Love is a little deity that spares no one. When one resists those darts he lets fly at us in a fair way, he takes another turn ; so that I would not wish you to have the vanity of making head against him. One way or other he is sure of you. *Though I have not to complain of the trick he has played me, I would not advise you to follow my example. It might come in time to have very bad consequences ; for by degrees your governors and officers would in their choice of recruits consult more their pleasures than the honour of your service, and your army might come at length to be like the regiment of your uncle Henry.*”

“ Uncle Henry,” the reader will recollect, was that favourite son of Fat William by whom the old King sought to supplant Frederick himself, while the latter was still philandering with the fair Doris. Perhaps one ought not to be surprised at the old man’s preference. There is little doubt that, beyond and above all the savage eccentricities

I have narrated, he was—to quote Macaulay—“disfigured by odious vices”; his very “transports of rage” at Frederick’s youthful and natural offences being, says the great essayist, “those of a man who hated all faults except those to which he was himself inclined.” But Frederick had now turned his back upon youth and upon nature, and he was reconciled to his father. He sent the old gentleman, now in his dotage, presents of tall grenadiers whenever he could kidnap them at reasonable expense. With his cronies he made fun of the old gentleman’s perverse infirmity. He heard with undisguised delight that Fat William had taken to a bath-chair permanently, and though he raged and swore when the old miser showered ducats on his troops—clearly his mind had given way—he contrived to possess his soul in patience. He had not long to wait for his reward. Fat William died on May 31st, 1740, and Frederick, the greatest of the Hohenzollern, was King of Prussia.

The change in Frederick’s nature was made startlingly apparent to all who knew him almost immediately on his accession. His youth had been a trying period for himself. To others it had spelt ruin. Katt

had proved by his death on the scaffold his devotion to the young Prince. His family were in disgrace, and looked at much askance when they attended court. But Frederick's succession, it was supposed, would change all that. No doubt was entertained that he would restore to favour the family of his friend, of the man who had given up life in his service. Frederick very speedily knocked that illusion on the head. If Fat William chastened the Katts with whips, he would use scorpions. He requested them not to attend his court, and he sequestered all their offices—chuckling grimly the while. Thus did Berlin gather its first taste of the quality of the new monarch. Other painful disillusionments rapidly followed. The lady who had on his account been beaten through the streets of Potsdam, naturally expected some token of royal sympathy on the accession of her lover. She received none, however. A beggarly pension of sixty ecus was awarded to her, and for the rest she was told very positively that if she annoyed His Most Supreme Highness in any way whatsoever, the imprisonment she had undergone would be at once repeated. Thus Frederick sowed his wild oats. The friends of his youth received

the coldest of cold shoulders. The members of the Honourable Order of Bayard, that fraternity who had drunk in many a morning with the Crown Prince, soon learned that the King did not want them, and everyone who had a claim on the gratitude or the affections of the young sovereign speedily learnt to think of it as a disadvantage, not to say a menace.

But if the boon companions of the Prince's youth, his own familiar friends, were to experience rude shocks of disappointment their astonishment was as nothing when compared with the dismay which the new King was soon to excite through Europe. He had, during the halcyon days of the Rheinsberg period, when the world still thought of him as young, fresh, ingenuous, composed a somewhat pompous but elaborate plea for political righteousness, entitled the "Anti-Machiavel" "It was," says Macaulay, "an edifying homily against rapacity, perfidy, arbitrary government, unjust war; in short, against almost everything for which its author is now remembered among men." Reading this exhortation to-day it is impossible not to chuckle over its pious platitudes and impossible to resist the conclusion that their author chuckled also, even as he penned

them. The more ennobling the sentiment, the more rigorous the penance, that it enforced, the greater surely must have been the glee of the writer. For nearly every sentiment that "Anti-Machiavel" expressed, nearly every aspiration that its author indulged in, was opposed diametrically to the real beliefs, the real opinions, of the man; the man who lived to tell us in his "Memoirs" that "when Prussia, dear nephew, shall have made her fortune, it will be time enough for her to give herself an air of fidelity to engagements and of constancy—an air which, at the most, becomes none but great states or little sovereigns. I have already, dear nephew, told you that politics and villainy are almost synonymous terms, and I told you the truth."

But Europe had not then read the "Memoirs," and did not know its Frederick, and it took the "Anti-Machiavel" seriously, and heard of its author's accession with sympathetic interest. Perhaps old diplomatic hands like Walpole and Fleury thought that the young idealist might prove a little dangerous in practice, and one can fancy their shaking their heads gravely over some of the passages of this political tract, which exhorted kings and their chancellors to a rigorous respect



of the rights of others and to a strict examination of the means that they used to any particular end. A man who could write thus, they might say, might embark on a holy war, and what then would become of us? They need not have worried themselves however. Frederick *was* to prove dangerous; but not in the way they feared. He was to prove dangerous because, having (like another Kaiser) flagrantly deceived Europe, he violated, not only the maxims that he had himself laid out for the guidance of princes, but the most elementary principles of honour and faith among nations—principles that the most cynical, the most hardened, masters of diplomatic wiles shrink from disturbing. The “Anti-Machiavel,” in fact, was to prove that, so far as dissimulation and hypocrisy are ingredients of statecraft, he was easily their master.

It happened that shortly after the accession of this political purist to the throne of Prussia there died Charles III Emperor of Germany—the sovereign who, it will be remembered, had intervened to save Frederick’s head from falling side by side with Katt’s on the executioner’s block. This sovereign had devoted the last few years of his life to securing to his descendants

in the female issue the many crowns then belonging to the House of Hapsburg. Charles had no son : he was the last descendant in the male line of the House of Austria. And there was nothing for it but to promulgate a new law of succession, "widely celebrated," says Macaulay, "throughout Europe under the name of the Pragmatic Sanction." By virtue of this the Archduchess Maria Theresa, wife of Francis of Lorraine, succeeded to his throne and dominions.

It is very important to note that Macaulay, in this matter, at all events, a perfectly unbiassed writer, has no doubt whatever as to the entire propriety of the choice.

"No sovereign," says the great essayist, "has ever taken possession of a throne by a clearer title. All the politics of the Austrian cabinet had, during twenty years, been directed to one single end, the settlement of the succession. From every person whose rights could be considered as injuriously affected, renunciations in the most solemn form had been obtained. The new law had been ratified by the estates of all the kingdoms and principalities which made up the great Austrian monarchy. England, France, Spain, Russia, Poland, Prussia, Sweden, Denmark, the Germanic body, had

bound themselves by treaty to maintain the Pragmatic Sanction."

"That instrument," in fact, "was placed under the protection of the public faith of the whole civilised world."

But there was one man in Europe who cared less than nothing for the public faith, and who regarded "the whole civilised world" with a shrewd and calculating eye: the man who, later on in life, when told of a disaffected subject, asked, with damnable penetration, "How many soldiers can he bring into the field?" Frederick, "the Anti-Machiavel," took good stock of the civilised world and of its resources in the fighting line, and he decided that the army of giants that his half mad father had collected would render pretty good account of itself in any encounter that "public faith" or "civilisation" could just then bring against him. In a word, he snapped his fingers at Europe: he determined to agree to the claim of the Archduchess only on condition that he was able to grab one of the richest provinces beneath her sceptre.

It was a momentous decision. The arrangement which "the Anti-Machiavel" sought to violate was one that only a spirit proud as Lucifer's, and as evil, would have sought

to upset, without some valid excuse. "It was," says the judicious Macaulay, "an arrangement that could be set aside only by means of a general war, and, if it were set aside, the effect would be that the equilibrium of Europe would be deranged, that the loyal and patriotic feelings of millions would be cruelly outraged, and that great provinces which had been united for centuries would be torn from each other by force. The sovereigns of Europe were, therefore, bound by every obligation which those who are entrusted with power over their fellow-creatures ought to hold most sacred, to respect and defend the rights of the Archduchess."

Thus the unbiassed commentator. But to the new King of Prussia the matter appeared in an entirely different light. Frederick decided that if Maria Theresa was to succeed to the throne of the Hapsburgs he must have his price; and his price was the rich province of Silesia, which he made up his mind to grab without any delay whatever. Various explanations, numerous attempts at justification on the part of the apologists for the noble House of Hohenzollern, have been advanced to justify his seizure of Silesia. But all these pleas have

been knocked on the head by Frederick himself, for in those inconvenient "Memoirs" of his (inconvenient, that is, to his apologists) we find these truly illuminating words: "Ambition, interest, the desire of making people talk about me, carried the day; and I decided for war." His chances of success were good on the whole. To quote his own summary, there was the "weak condition of the Austrian Court, the empty Treasury, a War Apparatus broken in pieces, *and an inexperienced young Princess to defend a succession of those terms.*"

Yes, it seemed good enough, and "without any declaration of war, without any demand for reparation, in the very act of pouring forth compliments and assurances of good will, Frederick commenced hostilities. Many thousands of his troops were actually in Silesia before the Queen of Hungary knew that he had set up any claim to any part of her territories. At length he sent her a message which could only be regarded as an insult. If she would but let him have Silesia he would, he said, stand by her against any Power which should try to deprive her of her other dominions; as if he was not already bound to stand by her, or as if his new promise could be of more value than the old one."

I need hardly trouble to ask the intelligent readers what recent procedure of the land of culture this action of Frederick's recalls to their minds. Between the Kaiser telling Belgium that he must violate his pledge of neutrality towards her, but that he would offer her another pledge in return, and between Frederick telling Maria Theresa that he really must depart from *this* treaty, but that he would offer her another in exchange, there is no real difference. This initial grab of Silesia set the whole tone of Prussia's foreign policy for over a century and a half, and it has been truly said that it is Frederick the Great with whom we are at war to-day—Frederick, his aims, his methods, his habits, his ways of thought, all these have dominated the Hohenzollern, who followed in his footsteps, just as surely as they in their turn have dominated first Prussia and then Germany. But Frederick himself was in reality largely the victim, in some respects the mere copy, of the father who had so cruelly persecuted him in life, and who now, when he was dead, seemed still to control his actions and to dominate his thoughts. Between Fat William and Frederick the Great there were, of course, differences innumerable; one was a consummate general,



a great administrator, a born leader of men ; the other, for all his vigour, shrewdness, and ability, had all the insanity of genius without any of its fire. And yet in aims, methods, and essentials, how alike were the two men ! We may see the resemblance in this sudden attack upon Silesia. Frederick, like William, was dominated—let us give His Majesty his due !—by an intense, an overpowering, passion for his country, for Prussia and for her people. It was this burning, this quenchless, desire to secure the paramountcy of Prussia that decided Frederick to use the army his father had so industriously collected and so jealously preserved, and to use it with extraordinary effect to gain Silesia for his realm. It was this passion for supremacy—that the campaign and Silesia won—caused him to resemble that unhappy old father of his in more ways than one. I am afraid that his household—family he had none—had scarcely an easier time of it under the sway of the *débonair* free-thinking Frederick than under the rule of the Man of Wrath whom he succeeded.

His Majesty was possessed of an energy that would have taxed Napoleon and driven any of the lesser heroes of the late Dr. Samuel Smiles to despair. Think of it ! He used to be up in that palace of his



at Potsdam before the dawn—at four in winter and in the summer at three. Some wretched page, whom as one suspects had never been to sleep for fear that he should be caught napping, would appear out of the darkness with a basketful of letters, despatches, reports, plans, complaints—anything and everything was in this post. The engineer, charged with the drainage of a swamp, the captain who was in a hurry to get his company, the peasant who was wronged by “petty justice,” and the mechanic who despaired of any, all these had written to the King, and all these, let us admit, had the certainty that their complaints would be read by the sleepless eyes that were for ever watching over Prussia. In the cold light of the chill dawn the King would scan the seals narrowly to see that they had not been tampered with, and then fall on the letters and devour their contents, marking each with a shorthand of his own to be interpreted by the secretaries. Alas, poor secretaries! They sat down to the task before breakfast. They did not dare to leave it till late at night!

There were no scenes, no canings as with old Fat William. Something worse awaited these interpreters of the royal will if they made a mistake—to wit, imprison-

ment. Holidays were unknown to them. Even the joy of eating a meal in peace was theirs only one day of the week, and not always then. The King provided a perpetual grindstone which their noses never left. Under his supervision these unhappy wretches (Macaulay says they had to work "all the year round, like negro slaves in the time of the sugar crop") had to settle all the affairs of the kingdom. According to the French Ambassador, one of them had never even been seen by any human being save his master, who supervised all the departments of his administration. Pooh Bah was not a greater pluralist than Frederick became. It will be remembered that that august functionary summed up the extent of his activities under two heads: first he was the Lord High Chancellor; secondly, he was the Lord High Everything Else. Frederick might have adopted this nomenclature with considerable convenience, for not only was he king, but he acted also as his own treasurer, his own commander-in-chief, his own superintendent of public works, his own minister for home and foreign affairs, and in short his own everything else. Did a traveller wish to see the famous army of giants manœuvre outside Berlin? Why

then to Frederick must he write, and only from Frederick's own hand could the permission come.

It followed almost inevitably on the philosophy which he indicates in the "Memoirs" that he could trust no one's honesty, let alone their judgment, and the result was that no matter how trivial, how ludicrously trivial, the matter was, only the King could deal with it; only majesty could decide. It might be a petition for a favour so unimportant as a dog licence, or so considerable, let us say, as the planning of a new suburb; it might be that some officer had effected an improvement in gunnery, or another wanted a few days' leave of absence; large or small, momentous or insignificant, it was all one. The King of Prussia, he and he alone, could settle it, and woe betide the wretched secretary, the poor automaton of a clerk, who misinterpreted the royal scribble. When the King came back from his review, when he had done badgering the adjutant-general, who was made to produce vouchers for the very snuff that was purchased out of the royal treasury, when he had cross-questioned the captains, and put the privates through their paces, why then he would come running into

the room where the hapless secretaries sat shaking, and dipping at random into the heap of letters that he had had no time to check separately, he would scan one or two to see if his instructions had been followed. It was a shrewd test. If one of the secretaries were detected in a trick, then he could confidently rely on five years imprisonment in a dungeon. If he made an error, a shorter term was his portion. They must have longed, these wretched men, for Fat William and his cane. Under the old *régime*, the beating was soon over. But the new Pharaoh disdained to inflict such petty chastisement. The terror that he sought to inspire was of a different order. He aimed at paralysing men into a white sweat of mechanical obedience, and he succeeded. His clerks traced their faltering letters across each sheet, dreading to make a slip, fearing that some involuntary error would land them in prison, and shrinking within themselves when they heard his step. Frightfulness, in fact, was the order of the day at Potsdam, and fear sat throned with Frederick over Potsdam and Prussia.

The worst of it was that there was no escaping the baleful eye of the royal prodigy. Sleep seemed to be unknown to him. Food

moved him only to further and more exacting enquiries. Nothing, in fact, was hidden from his inquisition ! Not a bottle of champagne was uncorked without his express order ! He scrutinised every account, he checked each item of the expenditure. There is something irresistibly humorous, something wildly grotesque in the dilemmas that beset his servants. If the royal cook indulged in an unjustifiable expenditure of cayenne, or if too much parsley were used with the sauce, why then there was the possibility of a dread penalty. The royal palace seemed to the wretched servants at Potsdam merely an antechamber to the prison that was always kept steadily before their eyes, and to which they knew they would be sent for offences that in an ordinary household would meet only with a rebuke. How they must have loved Frederick ! One can almost fancy that for the first time in their lives they sorrowed for the death of the old King, and wished him back again, cane and all.

## CHAPTER V.

THE iron and pedantic parsimony which Frederick thus displayed to the terror of his household was by no means the only resemblance that our hero began to develop to his late lamented Majesty Fat William. It soon became apparent that the triumphs of the battle-field and of the council chamber were not enough for the boundless ambition of his restless spirit. That he should be known as a great commander and as a tireless ruler, who supervised everything in his realm down to the details of his own kitchen, was all very well in its way, but it still left the maw of his ambition unsatisfied. Alone among the sovereigns of Europe he was to excel in the arts also, to become their most discriminating patron, perhaps their most distinguished practitioner. Thus the young King reasoned. The trait is a common one in the Hohenzollern, as we shall discover. A profound belief, first in their divine origin, then in their superlative

abilities, leads nearly all of them to hug the delusion that there is really very little they cannot do if they give their minds to it. Fat William, who thought music ungodly and literature more than questionable, had himself conceived the notion that he could paint. His courtiers used to affect to be transfixed with admiration at the vulgar and depressing daubs that he would exhibit for their appreciation, and on occasions, when the ingrained avarice of his nature asserted itself, he would compel those who were loudest in their praises to purchase the masterpiece for some preposterous sum. With Frederick things were different. Painting was not much in his line, but he was certain that he was one of the greatest poets of the age, and that only the purblind folly of mankind prevented this fact from being recognised. It followed that men of genius should have the opportunity of discovering this. Accordingly, he began to offer the hospitality of Potsdam to all the wits and half the poets of his generation. I cannot think that there was any very generous motive underlying his entertainments of the bright particular stars whom he attracted into his firmament. That he enjoyed their society, especially so long as they professed admiration for his own



gifts, I have no doubt, but that he had any sincere, any spontaneous, admiration for their genius, that, I think, is very doubtful; and if we turn to the "Memoirs" we shall find that my opinion is not so very far out. "Thank God," he says to his nephew, "I pass for an author, but, between you and me, and not to let it go any further, they are a damned set of people, those they call wits. They are insupportable for their vanity; insolent, despising the great and yet fond of greatness; tyrants in their opinions, implacable enemies, inconstant friends, difficult to live with, and often flatterers and satirists in the same day. And yet, for all this, they are necessary beings to a prince who would reign despotically and who loves glory. They are the dispensers of the honours of celebrity; without them, there is no acquiring a solid reputation. They must then be caressed from our need of them and recompensed from good policy."

There spoke the true Hohenzollern! Probably had he been able to do so Frederick would have kidnapped men of letters much as his father kidnapped giants. But that being out of the question, he used other means. The pamphleteers and philosophers of the day were promised *largesse* and honour

if they would but come as the King's guests to the parvenu court of Potsdam. Just as a century later Bismarck—to use an expressive Americanism—"opened the barrel" invariably to journalists and press correspondents, so Frederick caused the news to spread far and wide that literary merit would find instant recognition at his court, and the starving hacks of Grub Street and the proscribed authors of 1, Rue St. Antoine learned with delighted amazement of the new King of Prussia, who was prepared to give them, not merely shelter and sustenance, but encouragement and an assured position, if they would but become his guests and friends.

Those were days when it was worth while to be an author, when noblemen climbed the stairs that led to Mr. Addison's garret; when, for all Dr. Johnson's gibes, the patron came down handsomely for a neatly worded dedication. But to be entertained in perpetuity by a king, "a regular, right down, royal king," that was something new in an age that was at once the most venal and the most outspoken in the history of literature. Small wonder, then, that Frederick's invitations met with an overwhelming response. Maupertuis, who had been in charge of an Arctic expedition for the French Government (in

order to discover whether the earth flattened at the Pole !), and Algarotti, the Italian astronomer, Baculard d'Arnaud, the poet, were among those who hastened to Potsdam, little knowing what lay behind the flattering invitation of the King. But with them, or hard in their wake, came another—a man of vastly different stature—perhaps the one man of genius that Frederick ever succeeded in attracting to his court.

Voltaire had visited the King before on at least three occasions. He had been Frederick's guest at Rheinsberg for some months, and had received innumerable marks of the royal favour; and despite the fact that he had been made on occasions to revise the royal verses (as to which he later expressed views the reverse of complimentary), there is no question but that the author of "Mahomet" was inordinately pleased at these attentions from a crowned head. As for Frederick, in so far as it was possible for him to feel sincere, whole-hearted admiration for any man, he felt it for the great Free-thinker, who had been the guide, philosopher, and friend of his unhappy youth, and who now, at the zenith of his powers, was the terror of every sovereign of Europe: sovereigns whom Frederick secretly hated, and

whom he delighted to learn were about to be castigated by the merciless satire of Voltaire's vitriolic pen. Something approaching a generous glow stirred in the bosom of Frederick at the prospect of welcoming Voltaire, and the ingrained parsimony that his household had learned to dread was, for a brief space, actually relaxed. His treasurers must have stood aghast at the news that Voltaire was to have a thousand louis for the expenses of his journey, that he was to be provided with expensive apartments, to have a well-served table, and a liberal pension. An uneasy suspicion flashed across their minds that their master had gone mad. He could not, they reasoned, be himself, and strange fears—or shall I say hopes?—chased each other through their minds. But their suspicions were short-lived. Frederick's spasm of generosity—the only one he ever experienced in his life—was soon over, and he lapsed back into his old familiar meanness. The poet (who, truth to tell, was very nearly as rapacious as the King was avaricious) demanded, or at least suggested, that he should bring with him his niece, Madame Denis, and requested another thousand louis on behalf of the lady. The request was promptly refused, and it seemed at one time

as though the visit would never take place. But Frederick, with that consummate tact born of his insight into the foibles of others, suggested that if he did not come another poet would supplant him, and instantly Voltaire set out—to enact with Frederick one of the most amusing of the tragi-comedies that history affords.

It was in the year 1750, at the very middle of that century that somebody once remarked was twined like laurel round Voltaire's brows, but which, on looking back from the vantage point of years, seems to have belonged more definitely to Frederick: it was in 1750 that the great Frenchman arrived in Prussia. It is but fair to Frederick to say that had the poet been the head of a friendly state, with a vast treasury and a huge army at his disposal, instead of a penurious man of letters, he could not have received a more magnificent reception. Never certainly in the annals of literature had one of its sons been so honoured. Potsdam, Voltaire wrote to his friends, was a paradise of philosophers! And so, indeed, it must have seemed. Frederick awarded him a pension of £800 per annum, created him chamberlain, and placed the royal cooks and the royal coachmen at his disposal. The very apartments that Voltaire was to

occupy had been those that Marshal Saxe had slept in when the great General came to Prussia at the height of his glory. Voltaire was, we know, a vain man—vain to the point of childishness. And when Frederick touched with his lips the grisly hand of “the little grinning skeleton,” his cup of happiness must have seemed full to overflowing. All that he had suffered for the sake of outraged humanity, all that he had borne with rather than palter with his opinions—the anger of the great, the ingratitude of the people, the very indifference of those for whom his pen had won justice—all this must have been forgotten in that supreme act of condescension when the great warrior and ruler bent low before the wizened figure of Voltaire; and but for the sequel—the distressing and inglorious sequel—one might regret that no painter had seized the moment for the illustration of a theme that, though trite, has still its attractions for men of letters, if for no one else.

But perhaps it is just as well that the mid-Victorian artists missed this opportunity so suited to their pictorial genius. The sequel to the meeting is not pleasant. Indeed, if it were not so intensely ironical and so extremely amusing—one can hear the laughter of the gods



through it all—one would feel tempted to forget the whole business.

Unlike his father, the Admirable Crichton of Potsdam did not carry a cane about with him for the purpose of chastising those with whom he came in contact. He had a deadlier weapon—his tongue; and he had the same delight in giving pain and causing annoyance that inspired his illustrious ancestor. Very speedily did Voltaire discover this. Very speedily it became apparent “that the amiable King had,” as Macaulay puts it, “a trick of giving a sly scratch with one hand, while patting and stroking with the other.” Potsdam, for all its pomp and glitter and attractions, had a daily *régime* that was in reality designed to mortify and infuriate the men of talent and ability who had been entrapped there, and who, it soon became obvious, had been beguiled merely to gratify the itching malice of the man who pretended to be their patron and friend. There is in Ariosto’s “Orlando Furioso” a character named Alcina, who changed the bright vivacious spirits of her lovers to leaden despair and brutish apathy, leaving them scarcely enough vitality to warn new-comers to their mistress’s palace that they would share the same fate.



Such a palace as Alcina's, Potsdam soon became and those of the favourites of the King who entered it full of hope and ambition, charmed with the splendour of their reception and the warmth of their welcome, lived on to taste the sickness of hope deferred, the bitterness of degradation, and to bear with what dignity they could undeserved and brutal ignominy. Frederick's great delight was to set his wits by the ears; to inspire the fiercest hatreds and resentment amongst them, and then, having sown these tears with an industrious hand, to mock at all of them impartially. Thus the dinner parties that Voltaire found at first so agreeable soon became grim trials of endurance. Frederick was a rare conversationalist. He could flatter a man to the top of his bent without seeming to exaggerate, and could hold his own, and more than his own, with the brilliant men around. Had he been content to give and take in the verbal sword-play in which he delighted to indulge all would have been well. But it is only a sportsman who can do that, and Frederick's capacities did not lie in that direction. He preferred to hunt his guests rather than play with them. His methods were extremely simple. His visitors, he insisted, were to

meet him on a perfect equality, to answer his *badinage*, to give him blow for blow. Constraint, the deference due to a sovereign, the submission one extends to the opinions of one's host, all these were to go by the board. The King asked—nay, he commanded—that his *protégés* should enjoy perfect freedom. But woe betide the wretch who dare to exercise that freedom to Frederick's hurt.

At dinner the King would crack a jest at the expense of one of his guests—probably a poet, whose work he had just been applauding to the skies. Perhaps the victim would reply. Frederick would make him the butt of the table and send his fellow-authors into convulsions of mirth at the contemptuous raillery that he poured out. Probably the object of this attack was more than a match for his master, and Frederick would invite him to reply in kind. But if he dared to turn the laugh against his torturer, inevitably some cruel affront, some humiliating restriction, would be imposed on him. At the best his salary would be cut down. At the worst the royal servants would get secret instructions to make his life intolerable. Frederick, in a word, was content to enter the ring with these men, and to joust and to box with

them ; but only on condition that they kept one of their hands tied firmly behind them, so that they could not hit back. That Frederick was a great man there can be no shadow of doubt. His fortitude during the Seven Years' War, when, with extraordinary resource and marvellous determination, he bore up against the whole of Europe, proves that to the hilt. But we may say this of him : that never was greatness allied to such meanness of spirit, such petty vindictiveness as his.

There have been men greater than Frederick who have shown themselves to be even baser and more wicked. Has there ever been one who displayed such paltry, such contemptible, pettiness of spirit ? His whole life seems to have been consecrated to the lust of dominion and Potsdam in peace must have made his familiars long again for war. " If," says Macaulay, " a courtier was fond of dress, oil was flung over his richest suit. If he was fond of money, some prank was invented to make him disburse more than he could spare. If he was hypochondriacal, he was made to believe that he had the dropsy. If he had particularly set his heart on visiting a place, a letter was forged to frighten him from going thither."

Frederick's literary guests were expected, and naturally, to present a certain appearance, to live up to a certain style. And the moment that they were able to do this without undue effort he cut down their allowance. If they flattered and agreed with him they were venal cowards and contemptible sneaks. If they stood up to the royal bully, why then they were marked men. Small wonder that, as Macaulay says, the wretchedest hack out of Monmouth Street, the meanest scribbler of the feeblest verses, longed when at Potsdam for his garret and his self-respect; longed to be back at the ill-paid drudgery from which he had been tempted before his manhood had been sapped and his spirit broken. And all the time Frederick posed before Europe as the affable patron, the enlightened protector of letters, who was affording sanctuary to the free spirits of Europe! Sanctuary! They would have sooner starved in the Fleet or been pelted in the pillory; they would have sooner gone to the Bastille, or fled, like Tom Paine, across the Atlantic, rather than have supported such a *régime*—a *régime* that gave them, it is true, meat at the royal table, wine from the royal cellars, and apartments in the royal palace, but that was designed to

keep them in a state of perpetual exacerbation, to mortify their spirit, to break down their pride!—in a word, to make their lives a torment.

Let us turn once again to those invaluable “Memoirs,” where we may find in Frederick’s own words the true explanation of his attitude to men of letters:—

“As this is a profession, or call it, if you will, a trade, that takes us off from the occupations worthy of the majesty of the throne, I never compose but when I have nothing better to do; and to give myself the more ease in it, I keep at my court some wits, who take care to put my ideas into order.

“You have seen with what distinction I treated Monsieur d’Alembert in his last visit here; I always set him at my table, and did nothing but praise him. You even seemed surprised at the great respect I shewed this author; but you do not know, perhaps, that this philosopher is listened to at Paris like an oracle; that he talks of nothing else there but of my talents and my virtues; and that he maintains everywhere that I fulfil the character of a true hero and of a great king.

“Besides, there is a sort of pleasure to me in hearing myself praised with wit and

delicacy; and, to deal sincerely with you, I am far from being insensible to panegyric. I cannot dissemble to myself that all my actions are not clearly praiseworthy; but d'Alembert is so good-natured that, when he sits by me, he never opens his mouth but to say obliging things to me."

It is hardly surprising that with a patron such as this Voltaire should not have stayed long at Potsdam. The wonder is, indeed, that he endured such an atmosphere and such a court for a fortnight, let alone two months, especially as it is obvious that Frederick commenced to plague him the moment he had taken up his abode at the palace. He commenced by methods that are at once so contemptible and so grotesque that one does not know whether to pity Frederick or to blame him. He cut down, by a sort of special ukase communicated to the cook, his guest's allowance of chocolate and sugar! I am inclined to think that, abject as was Frederick's meanness, it was not his ordinary rapacity that dictated this step. The King knew his man. He knew that Voltaire, the great writer, the daring satirist, was yet greedy as a child, and with a child's vanity. Had Voltaire's character partaken of a quarter of the breadth of his intellect he would have



disdained to notice so contemptible, so ludicrous, a mark of royal chagrin. But the great man was furious. It was not the absence of the sweetmeats, it was the injury to his dignity that stung him to the quick, and he took his revenge actually—by pocketing the wax candles in the royal antechamber. The news in turn made Frederick furious. One can imagine him storming and raving as he had to sanction an overdraft by his major-domo on that kitchen cupboard, where everything was measured out, and weighed, and signed for, just as if it had been the vault of a bank in which diamonds had been lodged. How Voltaire chuckled when he heard of Frederick's chagrin! How his sardonic face must have been wreathed in happy smiles when he met the King at dinner that night. His chocolate was forgotten! He had compelled Frederick to a raid on the tallow candles. And so the two most distinguished, perhaps the two greatest, men of their age stabbed at each other, using weapons that a schoolboy would have disdained, the one sinking to the level of a cheese-paring boarding-house keeper, the other avenging himself by petty thefts.

Soon the combat got fiercer. The King had a pretty wit. He began to exercise it with



impunity on Voltaire as he did on others. At once he found out his mistake. There were few men in Europe who could measure swords with that master of sarcasm, and the King of Prussia was not one of them. His first attempt to poke at Voltaire drew forth a stinging retort, delivered with all the explosive *diablerie* of its author, a retort that silenced the King instantly. How the poor wits must have rejoiced ! With what envy they must have regarded the great Frenchman, and with what wonder ! Here was somebody whom their royal master could not bribe and could not bully ; who positively exulted in his contempt for the King, and dared him to renew the combat. In an instant his late tormentor noticed the change. He set himself to turn his other guests against Voltaire by perpetually exalting their work over his, glorifying their comparatively feeble performances, and indicating in what he thought their superior merit consisted. He could not have hit on a surer plan for plaguing his enemy. Voltaire's rage and fury knew no bounds, and once again King Frederick triumphed, and his servile followers, that he lately tossed and gored and trampled under foot, came meekly to heel and ate out of his hand.

But Voltaire soon had his revenge. The King had sent him a large quantity of verses for his revision and criticism, and at once the author saw an opportunity of striking home at the enemy. "Look," he said to another author, "see what a quantity of dirty linen the King has given me to wash!" The remark soon found its way to Frederick, and it rendered that great man furious. For his poems, his wonderful poems, to be so spoken of—it was an outrage not to be borne. Instantly he resolved on his revenge, and set about to plan it with his usual ruthless sagacity and insight into human nature.

As I have explained, one of the rivals to Voltaire at Potsdam was the geometrician Maupertuis. I say "rival," because they were both candidates for the regard of Frederick, but in point of actual fact Voltaire towered high above the other Frenchman, whose very name has long passed into the *Ewigkeit*. But Frederick had made him President of the Academy of Berlin, and accordingly required that everyone in his suite should take the explorer with a certain degree of seriousness. The King continually annoyed Voltaire by singing the praises of his fellow-countryman, and contrived with the skill and malice that never failed him to produce

between the two suitors for his favour a bitter hatred. Secretly, I think, there is no doubt that Frederick inclined to the view that Maupertuis was a pretentious dullard; but he was also the President of the great Berlin Academy, and it would, therefore, never do to let that fact be whispered abroad, much less let Voltaire publicly deride the man whom he and the King—when they were not sneering at each other—joined together in making fun of. That would never do. The great Berlin Academy would be hopelessly discounted and the “bluff” of Prussian “Kultur,” which even then, it should be noted, was being elaborately prepared and rehearsed, would be, to use vulgar parlance, “blown on.” So that the King’s admonitions to his favourite philosopher, the man whom he alternately loaded with favours and then insulted, were very strict on the point indeed; and Voltaire was thereby tempted, as nothing else could have tempted him, to transgress.

It happened that the great Maupertuis had just about this time perpetrated the doctrine that doctors should only be paid on results, on the principle, in fact, of no cure no fee. There was something in the idea that lent itself to the peculiar powers of ridicule that

Voltaire possessed, and he penned the diverting satire of Doctor Akakia, in which his rival's pet theory was with its author held up to the scorn and derision of mankind. When the effort was read to Frederick he rocked in joyous laughter, but the more he laughed the more also did he enjoin Voltaire not to print the delicious trifle, lest all Europe should join in the hilarity and the brand new Academy stand discredited in the eyes of mankind. I am sorry to say that Voltaire agreed very readily to the promise that the King required of him, and then instantly set about the business of breaking it. The "Diatribes of Doctor Akakia" appeared, to the consternation of the Prussian professors of the Academy, and to the uncontrollable rage of its founder. He demanded an abject apology from the author, and had the pamphlet burnt by the common hangman. Voltaire, finding that he could not save himself by lying, made a virtue of necessity, and threw his pension, his cross, and his key back into the face of the monarch. There was a violent scene between the two men. Then, simultaneously, they remembered the dignity that belonged to them both. They exchanged a cold farewell—and parted.

So far it is difficult to say who comes worse

out of the business, difficult to discover which of the two great men displayed more petty spite, more malicious rancour. If Frederick had been the meaner, Voltaire was undoubtedly the more treacherous, and if the incident terminated at this point one would close heartily despising both. But, as it happened, Frederick, leaving the other far behind, was to perpetrate an outrage that stamps him as being certainly a black-guard, probably a coward. Voltaire had in his keeping when he left Potsdam a volume of those wondrous poems of the King which their author, for all his disdain of authorship, yet treasured as revealing the choicest outpourings of his delectable spirit. The story goes that Frederick affected to fear that Voltaire would endeavour to plagiarise some of the deathless stanzas that were to be found in the volume. But from what one knows of Voltaire, to say nothing of the verses, it seems far more probable that the great critic desired to emphasise their peculiarities and crudities in such a manner as would cause "Dr. Akakia" and the hilarity it excited to be quite forgotten in the fresh paroxysms that would be excited. The King's cheek paled as he imagined what the mordant wit of Voltaire might find to say about his weak

and pompous verse. In his terror he lost his head completely. It was not enough that his guest was stopped at Frankfort and made to yield up the precious volume. So much he had a right to enforce. But he went further. Voltaire was confined close upon a fortnight in a wretched hovel, where sentinels with fixed bayonets kept guard over him, and made to pay a forfeit of 1,600 dollars to his captors, which no doubt the King pocketed. His niece, who was utterly blameless in the matter, was dragged through the streets and insulted, and not till both of them had suffered the grossest indignities were they set free. Thus did Frederick glut his spite on the man whom he could not buy and dared not bully; thus did he humiliate the one free spirit that he entrapped into the literary harem of Potsdam. Within two months of Voltaire's reception, within two months of bowing and scraping over his hand, within two months of fulsome eulogy and extravagant praise, the Hohenzollern had asserted itself and Voltaire, whom the King delighted to honour, was in prison! He left it a ruined man and an exile alike from Prussia and his own country.

It is very typical of Frederick, as it is indeed of Prussia, that the King denied all



knowledge of Voltaire's arrest and imprisonment. That I need hardly say was only one of those characteristic acts of equivocation which Frederick frequently practised, and in which, to do him justice, he saw nothing blameworthy. "If there is anything gained by being honest, let us be honest; if it is necessary to deceive, let us deceive." *Litera scripta manet*. All the eloquent rhapsodies, all the tears which Carlyle poured out as offerings to the idol of his idolatry cannot wash out that sentence. All the triumphs and achievements that Frederick engineered cannot alter the fact that not once, but frequently, did he give orders to his officers to pillage and demolish the houses of persons against whom he had a grudge, charging them at the same time to take their measures in such a way that his name might not be compromised. And as then, so to-day. In this matter as in others, Frederick has set the fashion for all time to Prussia.

"The evil that men do lives after them;  
The good is oft interred with their bones."

And the evil of Frederick the Great is to be seen in almost every dispatch issued from Potsdam during this war of 1915. Duplicity has become as a second nature to the nation that he founded. To do wrong and to admit



it is one thing ; to plead necessity as an excuse, or to plead even a specious excuse that half deceives oneself, bad as that be, is of a different order to the denials that Frederick issued and that the Kaiser issues to-day.

Look for a moment at the facts. Cardinal Mercier is arrested, and opinion is roused again against Germany. What does her Government say ? Remember there are half a dozen pleas that her spokesmen could urge in defence, pleas that are really arguable. They might say, for instance, " We hold this territory by force. His Eminence is, in effect, pleading that our behests shall not be obeyed." They might say, " Belgium is under martial law. Under martial law we, like every other country, have the right to arrest who and whom we please." I do not say that these pleas would be unanswerable, but they would at least require answering. But what is it that the Germans do ultimately put forward as their justification, when they find the whole anger of the civilised world is roused against them ? They say something that cannot be answered, for it is too obviously insincere to require answering. " Cardinal Mercier," they announce, " is not, in fact, arrested. He is merely detained."

As with the cardinal, so with the cathedral.

When the civilised world protested against the shelling of Rheims Cathedral, I, for one, expected that the Germans would answer that they cared not a fig for Rheims Cathedral, that they thought there might be a hostile force behind it, that they were fighting to win, and that rather than run any risks they would blow every cathedral, ancient or modern, in their path to bits. I believe the answer would have won them a certain measure of respect; that even Englishmen, always so keen on the monuments of other nations, would have admitted that it was a straightforward answer, perhaps an answer difficult to meet. But the Prussians put forward quite another plea. They said, in effect, "We really only shelled the steeple of that cathedral, and it was comparatively a moderate shelling. The damage can be easily repaired." So, too, with the raid on the East Coast. Think of the absurdity of the elaborate pretence that bombs have been dropped only on fortified places: fortified as Whitby Abbey is fortified, or as is the pier at Scarborough. And then let us reflect that the real feeling of the Prussian is to hit us where and when he can, and to hit us, of course, with the least possible risk to himself.

Frederick the Great, the man who made Prussia, was a hypocrite—an ingrained hypocrite—for all his greatness, and he has grafted that particular sin, like all his others, on the nation that he made, and even as he made destroyed it. With all his violence, his ungovernable temper, his disgusting coarseness, his deadening limitations, and his hideous and repulsive vices, Fat William had no hypocrisy. Perhaps he was not, to use that delightful euphemism of modernity, sufficiently evolved. Perhaps, to put it plainer, he was too destitute of a sense of shame, not to say of decency, to trouble to deceive; too blind and ignorant of the feelings of normal men, too indifferent and insensible to the opinion of other states, to perceive the importance of dissimulation.

But Frederick, with his keen mind and vigilant spirit, with a wider vision, had a more degraded *morale*. He had his finger on the pulse of Europe. He saw the necessity of placating the conscience of mankind, even as he despised that conscience. Just as he laid, broad and deep, the foundations of the Prussian military system, organising and perfecting the beginnings of that huge military machine with which we are at death grips to-day, so he taught Prussian diplomats

the necessity of placating and deceiving the very countries that they were plotting to invade. Only when war was declared did the mask slip from that hideous face, intent upon ruthless subjugation and domination. And in peace, as we have seen, Frederick held the mask firmly on his iron features. Europe thought of him as the enlightened patron of literature, the friend of the arts, the disciple of science, who loved the society of brilliant men, who revered intellect, and desired that his court should be its refuge and asylum. And we have seen him fulfilling the part: tormenting men of talent; raising up one author merely to humiliate another. Clever, indeed, for none but a clever man could have delighted in the wounds that the wits gave each other in the battles that he made them fight when he had set them by the ears, and the table roared at each shrewd thrust and apt rejoinder. But what a base use of cleverness was this that rejoiced only in the foibles, the littlenesses, of able men? What a mean, unworthy host and patron was he who sat night by night at his table exulting only when his guests were mortified.

Perhaps had Frederick had a wife—a wife in something more than name—things might

have been different. But the princess whom he had so obediently taken to wife at his father's commands was a stranger to Potsdam. It is a remarkable proof of the thoroughness our good Frederick could on occasions display that to the day of her death that blameless lady never even saw the new palaces at Potsdam. She was allotted the château of Schönhausen for her separate residence, and there she was expected to remain. At Berlin, it is true, she was allowed apartments in the royal palace, and the King used on four or five occasions every year to dine in state with her, making no small ado about the ceremonial and treating his wife with a punctilio that must have appealed vastly to his sense of the serio-comic. And this much may be said for Frederick: that while he spared few men and no women if they crossed his path, to his wife he was always considerate, always courteous. Save that he omitted the trifling formality of living with her, we may say, in fact, that he was a model husband. Nor did the lady suffer any great laceration of spirit at his neglect. For it is recorded that on the evening of his death she gave a very costly and elaborate banquet.

From the wits whom he tormented and

from the courtiers and officials whom he bullied and despised, two figures, and two only, stand out as having won from his hard nature something approaching affection, even tenderness. The first was his sister.

Wilhelmina, the Margravine of Bayreuth, had suffered even more cruelly at the hands of their demented father than Frederick, and she had been beaten, insulted, and all but strangled in her brother's cause. She was one of the few, the very few, women that the royal misogynist could bear to have about him in that strange palace of brilliant slavery, and, rarer still, she was one of the few human beings that its controlling genius ever spoke of with deep and unfeigned emotion. The love that brother and sister bore each other had been fashioned out of the strong and most natural hatred that both had borne their father, and in the days when Fat William's iron terrors had poisoned their young lives, Wilhelmina, for all the blows and curses rained upon her, stood firm as her brother's champion. The memory of those days never left Frederick. Twenty years after his bad old father had drunk himself to death, the man whose whisper terrified Europe would start from his sleep, dreaming that Fat William had entered his room with a file of



soldiers to throw him into prison. "And I would wake bathed in perspiration, as though I had been plunged into the river." Even in the day the terror followed the King. "In the midst of my happiest moments, my father's image arises before me, and—my pleasure is gone." Perhaps his only compensation was that this, the one strong, human affection of his life, had its origin in those terrible days. Between him and Wilhelmina there was a swiftness of understanding and a vivid sympathy that might, but for untoward circumstances, have saved Frederick in his worst moods. Both knew the mind of the other; both would arrive without speech at the same startling conclusion. When, years later, in 1757, the armies of Prussia were being crushed beneath the weight of Europe, and when, unknown to all but a few confidants, Frederick contemplated suicide, the Margravine wrote stating that she was resolved to kill herself should he set the example. "I have not heart to dissuade you," the King replied. "We think alike." The tide of battle turned, and Frederick fought on. But the Margravine sickened. Frederick was on the battle-field of Hochkirchen when they brought him the news that he had lost his sister. "Then I



have lost everything," he answered. It was a true bill. Hochkirchen was one of his heaviest defeats.

But in the days of which I am writing, Frederick saw little of his sister, and gave her, one may surmise, only the casual passing thought possible to a man busy to the point of distraction, who rises from his bed at four and works almost incessantly till midnight. Perhaps, had she played a more direct and personal part in his life, she might have won him from his evil, his embittered, self. Perhaps his nature was incurably warped and perverted. Who can tell? The fact is that the princess came seldom to Potsdam and had little active influence over her brother, once he had passed his youth. True, he trusted her more than anyone in the world; but she had a husband and grievous troubles of her own, and though her heart was with Frederick, her lot was cast in other places. Only to one other person did he render the tribute of his esteem, and he, George Keith, Earl Marshal of Scotland, a brave and prescient soldier, too useful to be despised, was not likely to undertake the spiritual as well as the military redemption of his master. The rest of Frederick's associates were pigmies, on whose foibles he played cruelly and

remorselessly whenever he could spare time from the enormous, the appalling, tasks that nearly consumed him. So his days passed: in labours that drove his secretaries to a premature death, in freaks that broke the spirit of the men whom he had made his guests, in imposing on the army a discipline that drove men into asylums and the hospital. They say that on one occasion when he was dictating to a secretary, the poor, overtaxed wretch fell down in a fit. The King merely rang for another, and went on as if nothing had happened. That is really typical of the great King. On parade soldiers blanched under his baleful eye. At dinner the brightest spirits of their time choked rather than answer the royal sarcasms.

So much for Frederick the greatest of the Hohenzollern in peace. It is not a pleasant picture. As one looks with disgust at its Hogarthian squalor, its unutterable meanness, its depraving cruelty, one asks how it ever came about that this man stamped his personality on a race, and lived to extort the admiration of a hostile world. But turn to the Frederick of the battle-field and we understand; for so long as men love life they will worship courage, and that Frederick had courage—an inhuman, a diabolic courage,

if you like, but still courage—who will deny ? True, he ran from his first battle to take shelter in a flour mill while others won the victory for him ; true, he was at first the veriest bungler, the merest travesty of a commander. But he lived not merely to become the greatest captain of his age, but to face odds that even Napoleon never encountered, and to face them with a resolution that it seems incredible was unshaken. Macaulay has given us a portrait of the great Frederick of that time, unmatched for merciless realism that yet moves us despite its ludicrous features, not merely to homage but to pity also. It is of the Frederick of the Seven Years' War that the great essayist is writing ; of that Frederick whom the whole of Europe then in arms against him could not bend ; for though defeat seemed certain and appeared inevitable even to Frederick himself, he fought on without hope, but without rest, with nothing but the naked, grim resolve to fight through or to go down fighting, while all the while the armies of Austria, Russia, France, Poland, and Sweden closed round the Prussian army. The French, under Marshal d'Estrees, were at his gates. The Russians were ravaging Silesia. Berlin had fallen. His own soldiers were on the

point of mutiny. His own family had turned against him. But nothing shook Frederick's resolve.

“That nothing might be wanting to Frederick's distress, he lost his mother just at this time; and he appears to have felt the loss more than was to be expected from the hardness and severity of his character. In truth, his misfortunes had now cut to the quick. The mocker, the tyrant, the most rigorous, the most imperious, the most cynical of men, was very unhappy. His face was so haggard and his form so thin that when on his return from Bohemia he passed through Leipzig the people hardly knew him again. His sleep was broken; the tears, in spite of himself, often started to his eyes, and the grave began to present itself to his agitated mind as the best refuge from misery and dishonour. His resolution was fixed never to be taken alive, and never to make peace on condition of descending from his place among the Powers of Europe. He saw nothing left for him except to die; and he deliberately chose his mode of death. He always carried about with him a sure and speedy poison in a small glass case, and to the few in whom he placed confidence he made no mystery of his resolution.

“ But we should very imperfectly describe the state of Frederick’s mind if we left out of view the laughable peculiarities which contrasted so singularly with the gravity, energy, and harshness of his character. It is difficult to say whether the tragic or the comic predominated in the strange scene which was then acting. In the midst of all the great King’s calamities, his passion for writing indifferent poetry grew stronger and stronger. Enemies all round him, despair in his heart, pills of corrosive sublimate hidden in his clothes, he poured forth hundreds upon hundreds of lines, hateful to gods and men, the insipid dregs of Voltaire’s ‘Hippocrene,’ the faint echo of the lyre of Chaulieu. It is amusing to compare what he did during the last months of 1757 with what he wrote at the same time. It may be doubted whether any equal portion of the life of Hannibal, of Cæsar, or of Napoleon will bear a comparison with that short period, the most brilliant in the history of Prussia and of Frederick. Yet at this very time the scanty leisure of the illustrious warrior was employed in producing odes and epistles, a little better than Cibber’s and a little worse than Hayley’s. Here and there a manly sentiment which deserves to be in prose

makes its appearance in company with Prometheus and Orpheus, Elysium and Acheron, the plaintive Philomel, the poppies of Morpheus, and all the other frippery which, like a robe tossed by a proud beauty to her waiting-maid, has long been contemptuously abandoned by genius to mediocrity. We hardly know any instance of the strength and weakness of human nature so striking and so grotesque as the character of this haughty, vigilant, resolute, sagacious blue-stocking, half Mithridates and half Trissotin, bearing up against a world in arms, with an ounce of poison in one pocket and a quire of bad verses in the other."

Never, surely, in the whole of military history has it been given to any man to cut a figure at once so pathetic and so heroic, so ludicrous and yet—who can gainsay it?—so majestic.

But to this paradox of Frederick's nature we must add another as baffling. The tyrant of Potsdam, who terrified his cooks and plagued his guests, was, to be just to him, at once the most merciful and in some respects the most enlightened ruler that Europe had ever known. Perhaps the explanation is that there is no fun to be got out of annoying people that one never



sees, and that, therefore, Frederick was inclined to deal justly with a petition when he would have been brutal with the man whom it concerned. Perhaps his intellect, clear and penetrating, asserted itself in this as in practical matters. Who knows? Every man is a mystery, a mass of contradictions, as we may find out even by a casual study of the police court reports, where the virtuous wife and devoted mother is found to be a shop thief, and the thief, turns out to be a hero who risks his life for another. And so with Frederick. The domestic bully was a wise ruler and a merciful King. To his eternal honour be it written, he was the first continental sovereign to veto the horrible practice of obtaining evidence by torture. He abolished capital punishment, save for murder and grave offences. He insisted on the people getting prompt and cheap justice. More, he allowed every form of religion and irreligion, and at the very period when England was penalising the Catholics of Ireland with senseless severity he insisted that the members of that Church should be immune from persecution in his realm. "In my kingdom," he remarked, "everyone shall go to Heaven his own way," and though one feels that he had some doubts as to the destination,



yet the sentiment is excellent. Once, in fear and trembling, they brought him a pamphlet—a lampoon, in fact—of himself and asked for directions as to the bookseller. “Let him sell it by all means,” said the King. “I trust he will do well out of it,” and he went chuckling off to review his troops—whom he held to be an effective answer to any number of pamphlets.

Then, again, consider his energy, his resistless, tireless, measureless energy, that kept him working from before dawn till after midnight, that made him the despair and the envy of his generals and of his counsellors, and enabled him to know his kingdom as intimately as his own household. There has never been anything like his industry or like his courage in the whole of history. The night of his death, when it was obvious to all but he that his time had come, Frederick enjoined them to wake him at four “because I have so much to do.” Then he gave some directions for the comfort of his dog, and at last his tortured spirit entered into the great rest that not the most relentless toiler can escape.

It is difficult to deliver a final verdict on Frederick, but this at least we may say: he knew no rest, he knew no fear. It may be

that deep in his soul he had a sense of horror that made both impossible. There is a dreadful sentence in the "Memoirs"—the most dreadful sentence of all—that seems to show this: "I could take a pleasure in play," he says, "but I cannot bring myself to a habit of enduring to lose. Besides, play is the looking-glass of the soul; and this does not at all do for me, *for I do not much care that anyone should look into mine.*"

## CHAPTER VI.

ONE of the many practical disadvantages of despotism is that even despots do not live for ever. Nor can they be easy about their successors. Despite the "exactness" of that science of Eugenics, which Prussian publicists perpetually vaunt, there is no certain method by which a man may transmit various approved qualities to his children. When, as in the case of Frederick, he has no children at all, the difficulties of providing a worthy follower in the despotic line are greatly increased, and constitute, in fact, the chief obstacle to that theory of government by expert, of which Frederick the Great, and later, the Fabian Society, have been the most resolute exponents. From a personal point of view, the demise of a particular autocrat may not be unwelcome. In the case of Frederick (whom, by the way, his own generation called "der Einzige"—"the Unique") this was certainly the case.

It is true that Treitschke, that great historical romanticist, affirms that "he [Frederick] left behind a generation which looked on the world more joyfully and proudly than its fathers, and enormously," he adds in a burst of rhetorical "Kultur," "had (*sic*) the State power which might in the future bring Germany a new day been raised." But Bismarck, who was as little given to deceive himself as he was prone to deceiving others, declared with truer insight that "the Prussians, who had cheered Frederick's victories, heard of his death with a sigh of relief"; and from what we know of Frederick we are not surprised. Yet from a purely material point of view, undoubtedly his death was a calamity to the country he had raised from the inglorious position of a mere province to the status of a great European Power.

Frederick had really wrought wonders for his people. He had drained the marshy waste land of his country and turned it into fertile fields; he had planted trees where agriculture was impossible, and had enormously increased the resources of the country. He had imported sheep from Spain to improve the Saxon wool, and endowed manufactories of porcelain, hardware, carpets, lace,

all of which he had made to flourish. So far as it is possible to organise a people without their co-operation, he had achieved success. "He had drilled them as he had drilled his grenadiers," and despite the protracted war, and the famine and desolation that had followed hard upon it, he had left his subjects infinitely better equipped with means for their advancement and improvement, and infinitely better off than they had been in the days when Fat William had bullied, scolded, and menaced them. But what he had *not* done was to cultivate in them the slightest aptitude for taking advantage of the opportunities he had created.

It is, perhaps, the cardinal failure of the Prussian school of statesmanship, as it is undoubtedly that of their generalship, that it never recognises how much depends on personal initiative; on the character and intelligence of the individual. The state, acting through the expert, is to decide everything; the individual nothing; with the result, of course, that when the expert ceases for any reason to be available, or goes wrong, then the "common herd" that he has been shepherding entirely fail to find their own way. The habit of regarding men as sheep, or at the best as

docile quadrupeds, to be driven and managed by especially selected guides, has obviously very serious objections. With Frederick and the Fabian philosophers of his day that theory held full sway. Frederick could never understand why the regiments he had formed from his Austrian and Saxon prisoners of war insisted on deserting *en masse* at the first opportunity. Their objection was to him as ridiculous and provokingly foolish as, let us say, the purely sentimental aversion of the Belgians to live under the yoke of Germany has proved to the rulers of that eminently practical people; or as the determination of the average man to select his wife for himself is vexatious to full-fledged Eugenists such as Dr. Saleeby and Mr. Bernard Shaw. In a word, Frederick had no idea of the value or inspiration that a people derive from the opportunities which liberty affords—the opportunities of making their own mistakes and of learning from them. In his life he had trusted no one; had vouchsafed no reasons for his decisions; had inspired no disciples. At his death he was dependent absolutely on his successor for a continuation of his life-work, and that successor, as we shall see, was the last man in the world whom he would have trusted.

“Who now,” said a peasant boy, when told of the death of the great man, “who now will rule the world?” Alas! the prince on whom this honour descended was the most unlikely man in all Prussia to essay the task. Frederick William II. (called like his grandfather “the Fat,” and the son of Prince Augustus William of Prussia) had many good qualities, at least of a negative description. He lacked, for instance, the demented irascibility of his grandfather, and but rarely beat his family or kicked those in his immediate *entourage*. Nor did he torment his cooks as to the precise amount of *sauce piquante* that they had used in the preparation of a certain dish, or enquire with microscopic exactitude into the amount of liquor consumed in the kitchen. He even astonished his subjects by being ordinarily polite to them! At that time it was the habit of the gracious Hohenzollern to address any of their subjects, not as “You” but “He.” This engaging and charming habit of placing human beings in a severely impersonal category was ended by the new King on his accession, and great was the rejoicing in Berlin! It will be seen, from this innovation alone, that he was, for a Hohenzollern, quite a human person and marked a distinct



advance on his progenitors. But I am bound to record also that, considered as a ruler, he was a most abject, pitiable failure. He was almost entirely destitute of that ability which had caused his uncle to play Providence to Prussia, deciding for his subjects such details as what distance they should travel, and at what expense, and what land they should cultivate or leave alone. He had none of Frederick's Fabian proclivity for minding other people's business; and, without being too severe, I must confess, he developed rather less ability than the average Fabian. He, in fact, flatly declined to meddle with everybody's business, or to bully and tyrannise over his subjects. This, of course, might have made him into quite a good King, and in point of fact the early days of his reign were marked by acts of singular tact and clemency. One Captain Blücher, who had been consigned by his benign predecessor "to the devil," was in a lucky moment for Prussia pardoned by the new King and re-admitted to the service, which also welcomed back the scarcely less illustrious von Yorck. The absurd tobacco monopoly was abolished. Money was found for the neglected work of educating the people. The wretched buildings that passed for schools were rebuilt. The even

more wretched teachers found themselves decently paid for the first time in their history. King Frederick William II. started admirably and it really seemed as if Prussia had entered on a new era.

But, alas! these high hopes were to be falsified. The new King very speedily "duffered out." Strong, brave, and naturally of fair ability, he had one little failing that made continuous activity on his part impossible. Not to put too fine a point upon it, his life and character were marred by that excess of gallantry which has undone men of far more commanding talent. His amorous proclivities were such that they would have got him into trouble anywhere in the world outside Salt Lake City, and even there it is probable that he would have incurred the hostility of the Elders. It was not merely that his love-affairs were so numerous as almost to baffle the most earnest chronicler, but he took them with that heavy Teutonic sentimentality wherein danger always lies. Had the King been a careless light-o'-love, such as our own peccant Charles, or an unmitigated debauchee, like his friend Buckingham, it would have made little difference, perhaps, to his statesmanship, however regrettable might have been the effect upon his

character. But Frederick William took his love affairs *au grand serieux*. He threw over the most squalid and sensual of them all a halo of mysticism and religion that left him in the clutches first of one *inamorata* and then of another—left him the slave of their caprices, the mere instrument of their whims. Each of them partook in his eyes of almost holy qualities, and each used the power they thus obtained to work their will on the destinies of Prussia, which from being controlled by the commanding, the ubiquitous genius of a great man, was now run in the interest of several low or narrow-minded women. Frederick the Great, it is interesting to note, had himself foreseen this danger, and he had unwittingly, in seeking to prevent it, actually ensured its happening. The story is so amusing that I must tell it in detail.

The first to achieve a permanent conquest over the impressionable young Prince was one Wilhelmina Encke, with whom he became acquainted while she was still fourteen ! It is alleged, though one hesitates to believe it, that Wilhelmina's elder sister, a *figurante* at the opera, had been living under the protection of the heir to the throne of Prussia, but that, detecting her in an intrigue with a Silesian count, he had sought solace in the

embraces of the younger sister. For this there is Wilhelmina's word, but it is fair to Frederick William to state that she was one of the most fluent liars of whom history has any record. But whether this part of her story is true or not, one thing is certain: she obtained, a little later, a hold over the young Prince of so strong a nature that Frederick, his uncle, became not merely alarmed, but furious. The offence against morals did not distress him in the least, but the idea that this woman, or rather this child, was influencing in any remote degree the conduct of public affairs, that obviously was too intolerable to be borne. He issued very drastic orders—orders of the kind that his ministers and officials knew better than to disregard, to the effect that any recommendation or suggestion coming from the Crown Prince was thereby vetoed in advance, and was to be acted on at their peril. One can imagine the trembling compliance with which the wretched secretaries heard the mandate; one can picture their almost frenzied haste in sniffing out anything that looked like princely interference. But that was not good enough for Frederick! One day, scowling through the grounds of the palace, he met the “young person” herself, and

promptly fell on her. She was made to feel the lash of that terrible tongue, and had her transgressions faithfully dealt with. More, she was warned that unless she saw the error of her ways the King of Prussia had means to bring her to heel. The lady wept and sobbed, but the great man was not mollified. "You must take a husband," he insisted, "that, or——" And the lady of two evils chose the lesser. One Reitz, who was actually the valet to her protector, was selected for the post. The King's wrath was appeased, and everything continued as before !

Let us have the lady's own account of the matter, as set forth in her "Confessions" :

"To make the old man [*i.e.* Frederick the Great] quiet, and the better to enable ourselves to carry on our mutual intercourse, the Prince proposed a match between me and his favourite valet, Reitz. His uncle, he thought, would the sooner forget me, and his foes, as well as mine, would, by this marriage, be brought to silence. I entered into the scheme, became Mrs. Reitz, and returned unconcerned to Berlin. To the old grumbler I was represented as an ignorant country wench, without any turn for intrigue, and



COUNTESS LICHTENAU.





incapable of governing the Prince, and still less of involving him, even in the most distant manner, in any foreign concern. This completely quieted the old man, and I passed my time in the greatest peace and tranquillity."

But the writer of this letter was very far from being an "ignorant country wench, without any turn for intrigue, and incapable of . . . involving him in any foreign concern." Had that been so, the history of the House of Hohenzollern, to say nothing of Europe, would have been entirely different.

In that case we should not have had to trouble ourselves about her; but we should have missed one of the most interesting studies in feminine depravity to be found in all history.

It used to be the boast of the lady in question that she alone among royal mistresses had enjoyed the privilege of having her mind formed by her royal lover. Nothing much more severe than this could possibly be said of King Frederick William II.—a fact that becomes apparent as we proceed with the lady's narrative of her life: a narrative that, by the way, is also the record of that period.

As we have seen, Wilhelmina had very early

captured the fond imagination of the Prince, who with his blend of mysticism and voluptuousness was a fairly easy prey to any pretty woman capable of lying without embarrassment. He had been so smitten with her charms that he engaged to have her educated in all the polite accomplishments and instructed in the deportment that marked the young lady of the period. At first, indeed, he undertook the task of her personal instruction himself, and the artful and ingenious young ignoramus was careful, we may be sure, to see that though the syllabus of her lessons was rigidly adhered to, the Prince should at times be reminded of a subject of cognate interest, in which she very emphatically was his mistress. Had it been possible, I believe that the young and ardent Wilhelmina would have insisted on her royal lover marrying her; but that being out of the question she extracted from her adipose but sentimental suitor the next best thing in the shape of the most solemn and impressive pledge that he could give. The pledge in question followed an ardent declaration of his affection for the lady, delivered with resounding emphasis and much gusto. This declaration, to make it the more solemn, the Prince wrote

down. Not in ink, however; that would be far too prosaic a means of recording the royal decision. He pricked his princely thumb with a knife and penned the words: "By my word of honour, I will never desert thee. Frederick William, Prince of Prussia." The little lady did the same, added a rider, not so well spelt, to the declaration, and the pair then separated both extremely well satisfied, though for very different reasons. A little later the fair Wilhelmina went to Paris to complete that education her lover had begun.

Madame Vestris taught her dancing and her sister much else, and Prince Charming endeavoured to please his most supreme uncle by affecting a vivid interest in field manoeuvres—a hobby in which, I fear, he was less successful than when under the orders of his lady love.

I have said that Frederick William could not marry Wilhelmina. There was an insurmountable obstacle in the way. Otherwise, I verily believe he would have become the lawful husband of his enchantress. That, however, was impossible. The Prince when he made her acquaintance had in point of fact been already married twice!

First, he was married to the Princess

Elizabeth of Brunswick, whom a little later he divorced; and then, in the same merry year, he espoused Princess Louisa of Hesse-Darmstadt, a lady whom he speedily got to detest very heartily, but who obstinately declined to give him any excuse for a severance. It is small wonder, therefore, that when Frederick William came to the throne his mind reverted to his old love, who had completed her education at Paris and was back in Berlin as Mrs. Reitz.

Let us hear the lady herself on the situation. Again I quote her "Confessions":

"The long-wished-for moment arrived at last; the old fellow died, and my dear admirer ascended the throne. An extensive field of action now spread before my eyes. 'This is the time,' said I to myself, 'to form my system; to govern, to rule, to enrich my friends and to humble the pride of my inveterate foes.'"

And that she was not slow to grasp her opportunity was made clear by subsequent events. She jobbed with a finish, a thoroughness, and an efficiency that would have made her the envy, had they been living, of every American political boss, or of our own Party organisers. She obtained at last as complete

an ascendancy over the uxorious and indolent King as if she had been the most exacting and virtuous of wives instead of the most shameless and avaricious of mistresses. Her first step towards the ascendancy she afterwards obtained showed her consummate cleverness. Frederick the Great, as we have seen, used to read his letters himself every morning, to note carefully their contents, to give exact instructions for their answer. But the new ruler of Prussia was made of vastly different stuff. While the great Frederick—even when a septuagenarian—saw every review out to the end, kept his men manœuvring for hours in the cold and let no detail, however small, escape him, Frederick William II. was content to watch the men march on to the parade ground, to nod his approval to their Generals, and then, after a few compliments, to withdraw, greatly, it must be confessed, to the delight of the officers, who were accustomed to groan under the iron discipline of the old tyrant. As with His Majesty's troops, so with His Majesty's mail; Frederick William, so far from scanning every document, could not, says Mirabeau, "be got to read even forty lines of any document," a statement that has been challenged but never wholly refuted. Certain it is that diligent application

was hardly in his line, and the astute Wilhelmina played on this disinclination. "Pray," says she, in her "Confessions," "pray what has a king ministers for, and why does he pay them? Let those work and let him be merry and amuse himself. State affairs are much too tedious to interfere with them." The lady was not slow to urge this very natural point of view upon the King, and the King was not very slow to yield to it. In fact, within a few months of his accession the King of Prussia was as much a cipher in the hands of his ministers as formerly those ministers had been ciphers in the hands of the King!

Perhaps that would not have mattered very much had the engaging Frederick William, who was not a strong man himself, been able to find a strong man to rely upon. Had he, for instance, found a Bismarck to his hand all would have been well. But there was no one like Bismarck available, and the moment Frederick William, under the insistent pressure of his Wilhelmina, decided to waive those prerogatives of sovereignty on which the great Frederick had insisted, he found himself compelled to rely for daily advice and guidance on the services of a statesman of a vastly different



calibre, which I may add was exactly what his mistress intended that he should do; a man who, half bigot and half charlatan, was as wholly lacking in statesmanship, as he was unscrupulous and industrious.

Johan Christoph Wöllner, who from being a semi-rationalistic priest became, first, a Freemason, and then a Rosicrucian—among whom he was known as “Chrysophiron” and “Helioconus,” was a most industrious person, who through many changes of fortune and of creed was always faithful to himself. He had for many years sought to win the favour of the great Frederick by writing prolifically on agriculture, but Frederick had summed him up “as a deceitful, intriguing priest.” He had, however, been successful in marrying the widow of General von Itzenplitz, whose son he had tutored, and had thereby obtained at least partial control of a very large fortune, for the widow had been left a goodly sum. Still the ambition that marked the man was left ungratified, and there is no doubt that his subsequent conversion to the sect he ultimately joined was effected at least as much by his hope of advancement in this world as in the next. For Frederick William II. had himself become one of the brethren,



and had the name of "Ormesus Laganswas" bestowed upon him. Wöllner, and one Bischofswerder, another of the craft, became his chief ministers of state, and they with the fair Wilhelmina, *alias* "Mrs. Reitz," formed the unholy trinity who were to control the destinies of Prussia.

There came a strange change, indeed, over the counsels of Prussia. In place of the unremitting vigilance, the iron discipline, of the great Frederick, "whose exertions were such as were hardly to be expected from a human body or a human mind," who decided every matter for himself and decided it absolutely on its own merits, who had no favourites and no scruple, but was "without faith, without fear, without mercy," there was not merely a laxity but an admixture of fraud and charlatanry calculated to make the dead King turn in his grave. The particular branch of the Rosicrucians that had come to the front at this time in Germany, and who had captured the King, were quacks of the most unmitigated description. They made no bones—if I may use so material an expression—about claiming the widest and strongest occult powers, magical signatures, the hermetic mysteries, and communion with spirits—these were mere trifles to the order.

And the King implicitly believed ; believed the more greedily because the claims of the Brotherhood were soon made to give some sort of sanction to the delirious affection that he bore the astute Wilhelmina, who, by this time, had the crafty Wöllner firmly on her side. The transports of passion were mixed with the excitement of occult research in a way that suited the lady exactly and the King (who, if we are to believe his fair companion, used to be liberally doped) would awake from a trance at a *séance* to find his *inamorata* in his arms, quoting the sanction of some amiable spirit, who on some ground or other had condoned the indulgence of the lovers. And in the intervals of these scenes the foreign and domestic policy of Prussia was settled by Wöllner, who had little difficulty in obtaining the sanction of majesty to whatever he wanted.

Strange doings used to occur in the house occupied by the illustrious minister, and in an artfully darkened room, shaded with gauze curtains, and hung with mirrors, the spirits of Julius Cæsar, the philosopher Leibnitz, and the Great Elector were introduced to the company and made to discuss the affairs of Prussia. So far as we can tell Frederick the Great's spirit was never included in the *séance*.

Perhaps, like Browning's "Mr. Sludge," the mediums had some lingering belief in the efficacy of the hocus-pocus that they practised, and hesitated to face the possibility of the dead King appearing in their midst. Had his spirit answered the call, we may say in all sincerity that the language would have lacked nothing in emphasis.

The lady chiefly responsible for these *séances* has left for us in her own words an admirable study of the effect that they produced upon the mind of the King. Writing in her "Confessions," she says: "As the King evinced a great predilection for everything supernatural, I was highly pleased at the arrival of the Chevalier Pinetti de Merry. This man sought my protection, and I was very willing to grant it. Furnished with numberless recommendations, and dressed out like a nobleman, with laced and embroidered clothes, watches, and rings, set with valuable brilliants, his access to the King was not very difficult. This fellow, in fact, was nothing but a charlatan, but he was well skilled in the art of deception, so that I saw his mountebankism might be of use to me and to my party. His tricks with cards consisted in nothing but legerdemain, and I placed no value on them; on the other hand,

his physical defections, as he pleased to term them, were the more entertaining. The King was highly pleased . . . made him a present of five thousand dollars for the erection of a theatre, and gave him the title of Professor of Physic of the Court with a pension of six hundred dollars a year" (!). Thus far had the King been lured on the road to senility by amativeness and occultism, till the ascendancy of the unscrupulous and energetic Wilhelmina was complete. The King, in fact, had got into that condition of chronic but fuddled amiability which prevents a man refusing any request that is tactfully pressed upon him. Finding this, the watchful Wilhelmina instructed her amiable husband to keep a pack of large mastiffs for the special purpose of frightening any suppliant for the royal favour whom she did not approve.

Wilhelmina had not reached this position of pre-eminence—or shall I say suzerainty?—without a hard struggle. At one time her claims had been seriously threatened. While he was under the very sway of her dominion the King fell in love with another lady, a person of entirely different calibre, it should be said, to the far from coy Wilhelmina. The new *inamorata* was one Fraülein Julie von Voss, a well-born and well-educated

spinster, whose cousin has been handed down to posterity as the great arbiter of Prussian propriety—the celebrated Tante Voss. These rigid notions of propriety had secured some sway over the lady herself, who declined with decorous severity to encourage the King in the ardent advances that he made. But, strange to say, the more proper did Fraülein Voss become the more fiercely did the King press his suit, only however to be repulsed with a decision and good breeding that immediately increased the hold which the lady had over his affections. The news of the King's fresh obsession spread throughout Berlin, and immediately Fraülein Voss became a person whom one emphatically ought to know. There used to be wagers in the taverns as to whether she would succumb to the King's advances or not, and the lady found herself the most sought after woman in court circles. The distress of the King, incontinent in mind as in body, was palpable to all from his groans and speeches, and helped to win for the indomitable Fraülein the support of all those who had been moved to fury by the dominion of "the abandoned Reitz woman."

Even the Queen welcomed the new attachment. Anything and anybody was preferable

in her view to the depraved Wilhelmina, and, from what one knows of that lady, it is very hard to gainsay the wifely decision. The situation was really unique, and has been admirably summed up for us by Mirabeau, who, in his "Secret History of the Court of Berlin," judiciously remarks that: "In the opinion of those who know that revolutions effected by arms are not often those that overturn states, it is truly a revolution in the Prussian monarchy to behold an example, for the first time, of a titled mistress who is on the point of sequestrating the King, of forming a distinct court, of exciting cabals, which shall be communicated from the palace to the *legions*, and of arranging affairs, favourites, administrations, and grants after a manner absolutely unknown to those cold and phlegmatic countries. The moment for the disgrace and the consequent elevation of Mademoiselle Voss approaches. Hence intrigues, sarcasms, opinions, and conjectures, or rather predictions. Amid this mass of suppositions, true or false, the following is what I can collect which seems to have most probability. My translation is according to the text of one of the former friends of Mademoiselle Voss to whom she has opened her heart.



“The new Joan of Arc,” the great Frenchman continues, “on whose head devotion would invoke the nuptial benediction, has been persuaded that it is her duty to renounce marriage, and sacrifice herself, first to her country; in the second place to her lover’s glory; and finally to her family’s advantage. The country, say her advisers, will gain a protectress who will remove covetous and perverse counsellors. The glory of the monarch will not be tarnished by a double marriage; and her family will not be exposed to the danger of beholding her a momentary princess and presently afterwards exiled to an old castle with some retiring pension. They affirm favour will be the more rapturous should rapture not be secured by the rites of Hymen; that the instant this favour commences she will rain gold on her relations, with dignities and gratuities of every kind. Religious motives have been added to motives of convenience. It has been demonstrated that there was less evil in condescension than in contracting marriage, while the former one remained in full force. At length it was concluded that this victim to her country’s good should be taken to Potsdam and offered up at ‘Sans Souci.’ A house has been prepared, sumptuously fur-







FREDERICK WILLIAM II.

nished say some, and simply according to others, and at which are all the paraphernalia of a favourite."

The fact that the new comptroller of the policy of Prussia was avowedly strongly hostile to France probably caused Mirabeau to regard her with some hostility, and we find, indeed, that he goes on to describe the King's new favourite as "ugly to a degree," with nothing to commend her to the discriminating taste of the King but "a fine bust" and "an air of vestal severity." I am, of course, quite unable to state whether this summary of the lady's charms is adequate; but certain it is that he does less than justice to her virtue. For, despite all the pressure that was brought to bear upon her, Julie von Voss remained absolutely adamant on the point of the morganatic marriage. If the house at Potsdam that Mirabeau refers to were ever prepared, the prudent Julie declined absolutely to enter it except as the wife of her importunate lover. And the marriage on which the lady insisted was no mere formal ceremony. She made it plain that she required for it all the authority that such a function could command. In the first place, it was requisite that the Queen should herself approve the contemplated

step, and the exquisitely ludicrous procedure followed whereby William had to repair to his own wife for her sanction to commit bigamy. Otherwise, he assured her, he would be unconsolable for life. The Queen had already been sounded on the matter, and had heard, we may presume, good reports of Miss Voss. She agreed, on condition that the "unspeakable Reitz woman" was cleared out "bag and baggage" !

I am sorry to say (for it seems rather mean of him) that Frederick William agreed most readily to this condition. I am also sorry to say that he never fulfilled it. Mrs. Reitz was transferred temporarily to a second place in his affections, but she continued to live under the royal favour. But this with the future was hidden from the Queen. She consented, and the King returned overjoyed to the fair Voss. Still that obdurate particularist was not satisfied. It was essential that the Church should recognise the marriage. The condition seemed a hard one. Poor Frederick William was again in despair. It seemed as if he were never to enjoy the charms of this imperious woman ! Once more, however, he threw himself into the breach, and the Church proved unexpectedly complaisant.

“Nice customs curtsey to great kings,”—the ecclesiastical authorities bethought themselves of the toleration by Melanchthon and Luther of the double marriage of Philip of Hesse! After grave reflection and for reasons with which I need not trouble my readers, they agreed to meet the King’s views; as, I need hardly say, they would have done if Philip of Hesse had never existed! Thus all the obstacles in the path of the royal bigamist were smoothed away and the virtuous Voss awaited him at “Sans Souci”!

How did all this affect the alert and resolute Wilhelmina? We find her feelings chronicled in the diary that she has left to posterity. “Woe! woe! and three times woe! The great mischief has begun. Miss V—— has yielded, and is the King’s favourite. Could you think of anything so exquisitely foolish as this? She has given herself up to the King on condition of having a left-handed marriage. The first court chaplain and member of the consistory on Friday last performed the ceremony at the palace of Charlottenburg, for which he received a hundred glittering Frederick d’ors. She is now formally Queen on the left hand, and, in the most extensive meaning of the word, the ruling Queen, for she governs even the King.

Would you believe it; another, a formal, law has by order of the King, been made concerning marriages on the left hand, and this law has been inserted in the code of laws with all the publicity to give a sanction to this archi-canonical mock-marriage! The public laugh at it, make remarks, and no one follows this Don Quixotism. But what," asks the lady, "is to become of me?"

That enquiry, one may safely assert, was by no means confined to the unspeakable Reitz. Fraülein Voss (who was speedily transformed into the Countess of Ingenheim) took the King in hand with a vengeance. She insisted on his attending to public affairs himself, and required that he should emulate the great Frederick in reading his own letters and giving close attention to business. She extorted from the King, in fact, a degree of good conduct and an amount of punctual attendance to business that even the wives of most monarchs hesitate to demand from their royal spouses. If the King did not exert himself sufficiently in the interests of the subjects of his realm, why then the austere and virtuous Countess of Ingenheim made him wretched by a cold denial of those transports of affection in which his heart delighted. The unfortunate monarch bitterly deplored

his fate, and longed again for his Wilhelmina; but, on the other hand, Berlin and Prussia generally seem to have welcomed the new ascendancy. Frederick William II. was a man by no means destitute of ability once he could be got to apply it, and the first effect of his enforced labours was that the crowd of parasites who extorted favourable decisions from him were shaken off. The King looked into matters for himself. Prussia breathed again. He had found a virtuous and patriotic mistress, and the land of Frederick the Great felt secure!

But, alas! this happy condition of affairs was not to be of long endurance. The Countess of Ingenheim passed away. Authorities differ as to the cause. Mr. Brayley Hodgetts, in "The House of Hohenzollern,"\* remarks that, having "virtuously bored him for three years, bore him a son, and contracted a cold out of devotion to her lord, she fell into a consumption and died." On the other hand, if we are to believe the "Confessions," the Countess did not die a natural death, for Reitz and his wife contrived to poison her—a story that those who know Wilhelmina's history will recognise is not nearly so improbable as it seems.

\* Methuen.



What lends some colour to the boast (for Wilhelmina regarded the removal of her rival as a great achievement deserving of the highest praise) is that poor Julie's aunt, the Countess Voss, writes in her diary that the end "came with dreadful suddenness . . . It came upon her like an attack of suffocation. No one dreamed of any immediate danger," and though an autopsy, following on the rumours of poison showed that the condition of the lungs was a sufficient cause of death, one is not very satisfied as to how much the doctors wanted to find out. They knew, what everyone knew, that the poisoner—if poison had been employed—would be paramount now that the woman who had supplanted her was gone. Well might the Queen exclaim: "I have lost my best friend," when told of Voss's death. She knew and dreaded the malign influence that was to overshadow the life of her husband.

For now that poor Voss had departed this life, Frederick William instantly repaired for solace to the arms of his neglected Wilhelmina, the woman who was henceforth destined to control both Prussia and her King so long as the latter lived.\*

\* It must by no means be assumed from this that Frederick William affected anything approximating to constancy in regard to this lady. He had many other affairs, including at least one

She was made the Countess of Lichtenburg, and at once she set to work to obtain from the King the means to maintain her new dignity. She received in landed property three comfortable little estates, yielding the respectable income of 4,800 thalers, with a monthly allowance of 300 louis d'or "as housekeeping money." Assured of this tidy little income she began to make the King really comfortable. The tedious restraint that Voss had imposed on the passions of the royal Lothario was gone, and gone too was the attempt to attend to the business of his realm. Our friend Wilhelmina lost no time in seeing to that. She lured the King on to a course of unremitting dissipation that left him the creature and the slave of those about him. "Pyrmont was converted into paradise upon earth; we had balls, operas, fireworks, casinos, suppers, breakfasts, horse races. All turned round the King in a perpetual circle of diversion." In the "Confessions" which she left the world in exchange for all the good things it gave her,

other morganatic marriage—this time with the Countess von Dönhoff. She, however, had a violent rupture with the Imperial Lothario. Feeling neglected, she appeared one day at a concert at Potsdam, and, brandishing her infant daughter in his face, exclaimed: "Here, sire, take what is yours." She was subsequently exiled, but received, I am glad to say, a respectable allowance to the end.

she has given us an engaging picture of the King's relaxations at this period of his reign :

“By the joint advice of Monsons and Reitz,” she writes, “I gave the king a *fête*, the gaiety of which was to surpass everything. The spot pitched upon for this purpose was one of those gardens at Potsdam, which we called the English Gardens, and in which all the beauties and deformities of nature are all collected and contrasted with each other on a few acres of land.” To these acres (kept under lock and key by one of the trusty “guards of the association”) the ingenuous Wilhelmina had added other beauties. Naiads, Cupids, Sylphs, and Nymphs thinly clad in gauze, were to be seen scattered, with their attendant swains, over the green lawns. For the King an elaborately prepared bower had been reserved. “The King would sit down upon the green, when on a sudden it opened and presented a beautiful sofa with cushions,” over which flowers were festooned. There the King would recline listening to the amorous music discoursed by vocalists, whose ardent strains, if they were not inspired by love had certainly been heightened by liquor.

“At length with love and wine at once oppressed  
The vanquished victor sunk upon her breast.

Alas ! there was a wide difference between Alexander and Frederick William, and under the potions, the nerve-rotting stimulants, and the hectic excitements of this life, the King's mind lapsed into something like idiocy. As it declined so did the power of this modern Circe increase. She is very frank about the matter in those agreeable "Confessions," from which I have already quoted. Let her speak again for herself. We shall not succumb to the voice of the charmer, as only her photograph is now available, and accordingly we are quite safe in waxing as virtuously indignant as we please :

"Upon the whole, my emissaries and I had, at that time, the most absolute and unprecedented sway. . . . My spies were dreaded everywhere. . . . Several of the public offices I caused to be given to my creatures ; I forged warrants of arrests and orders of the cabinet ; rewarded spies, informers, and runners with large sums of money and honourable offices ; nay, I had, without any apparent reason, a young lady arrested, merely because I dreaded that her beauty would supplant me. . . . A certain man in office, who repeatedly had embezzled the public money, sued for my protection.

I had him created a nobleman and chief judge of the Criminal Court. But in return for this good office, he was, from gratitude, bound to give his verdict in every cause that concerned either me or my friends as I would have it."

But that is not all! The lady boasts that she found means with her associates "to bribe those who were employed at the post offices in the country towns, and they would let us have certain letters, which we either destroyed or opened and sealed again without its being visible." She had "emissaries in foreign countries," agents in every political camp. In a word, she controlled not only the King but, according to her own account, a vast organisation for exploiting in every manner possible the unhappy subjects that nominally he governed.

It may be—who can tell?—that the frankness of this child of nature is as misleading to us as her reticence was to poor old Fat Frederick William II. It is possible that, just as the diaries of divines claim virtues that they did not always possess in their entirety, so this lady, who regarded crime as an accomplishment, really drew too flattering a picture of her own success in that direction, I cannot tell. But this much seems pretty certain.





FREDERICA LOUISA, WIFE OF FREDERICK WILLIAM II.



That under the spell of the enchantress the King and Prussia went very rapidly downhill. In fact, from the national point of view, things soon became deplorable, and by one of the most biting ironies of history almost every virtue that Frederick the Great had implanted in the Prussian State was changed, as by some hideous sorcery, into something rank and poisonous.

The great virtue of the dead Frederick's reign was that he had refrained from religious persecution. For the first time since Christendom was rent in twain there was, under his rule, a country in Europe where men might call and confess themselves Catholic or Protestant, or neither, without suffering the most trivial disability or the slightest annoyance. That was no mean achievement. It is true that at this time the rack and the thumbscrew were somewhat suspect as means of salvation. But all the same the spirit of persecution, black and bitter, brooded over Europe. In Ireland the Catholic who would not forswear his faith was robbed of his estates ; in France the Protestant who attempted to explain his was clapped in gaol. Free-thinkers were persecuted impartially by both sides, and occasionally, as in England, " the dissidence of

dissent" led men, who, members of sects scarcely distinguishable from each other in doctrine, themselves schismatics, to demand imprisonment for every schism but their own. It was a great thing for a King to have risen superior to the hatreds and prejudices inseparable from this attitude of mind, and to have forced alike on cold bigots and inspired visionaries the great principle of toleration, insisting that at any rate there should be one city of refuge in Europe where man should be free to convert his fellow without cutting his throat or getting his own head broken. It needed all the genius and resolution of the great Frederick to force that moderate amount of liberty on Prussia. It needed only the languid acquiescence of the royal debauchee who followed him for this concession to be torn to pieces.

In 1788, two years after his accession, Wöllner, no doubt at the instigation of the Prussian Pompadour, was installed as Minister of Justice and Chief of the Department of Religion. From that moment the King's popularity (which had withstood all the scandals of his amours and his neglect) waned. From that moment there set in a reaction throughout the public services of

Prussia that spelt ruin. Wöllner began to persecute all and sundry who did not belong to his own particular brand of the Lutheran faith. From the national schools that the King had set about reforming all the teachers who were not sufficiently orthodox—orthodox, that is, according to the light of *one* of the sects concerned—were sent packing. Some of them were sent to jail, others carried discontent throughout the country and were of course laid by the heels. As usually happens, when the state looks after other people's business it neglects its own. Indolence, slackness, and inefficiency spread through the nation. The army became dangerously disorganised. In a word, dry rot had set in in Prussia, and those who had discernment left shook their heads dubiously over the future of the nation that but a few years back had withstood almost the whole of Europe. But times had changed. The great Frederick was dead; in his place was Frederick William, who in turn was the tool of the creatures of Reitz, Wöllner, and Bischofswerder, the most depraved camarilla who ever intrigued away the destinies of a great people.

It was Bischofswerder who had instructed the amiable Reitz in the preparations of those

decoctions with which she was wont to ply the King, and Bischofswerder it was who now managed the King's foreign affairs. Perhaps under these circumstances it is not surprising that poor Frederick William entered on that most disastrous event of his reign—the coalition with Austria against the newly created French Republic; for it seems as obvious to me that Bischofswerder was the determining factor in arranging this as it is certain that Mrs. Reitz was in touch with the agents of the Austrian Court.

No doubt the poor King felt quite secure in entering on the project, and was as certain that his cousin of Brunswick would achieve victory against the French as that his army was as perfect as when his uncle drilled it every day. There are always plenty of people to tell a King that "everything is ready to the last button"; and one really cannot blame Frederick William's counsellors overmuch if they reported that, and that only, to him. The honest counsellors, who were sceptical of the great adventure on which he had decided were peremptorily silenced. Countess Dönhof, the second morganatic wife of the King (to whom I have already referred), tried her utmost to make him realise the risk that he was running, but her in-

fluence counted for nothing against the camarilla. Countess Voss notes with dismay that, unlike her niece, she "can make no headway against Reitz and Bischofswerder." Neither could the few honest and patriotic counsellors that were left at Frederick William's court. Reitz was paramount, and Reitz, for reasons I have hinted, had decided on joining the coalition and entering on the war that was to destroy the French Republic. Probably she thought the task would prove an easy one, for she, no more than the King, was a competent observer or a prescient judge of a difficult situation. It is certain that as a whole Prussia was confident of victory. Even after the disastrous campaign had dragged on for months the populace were fired by news of the glorious victories that the sublime Hohenzollern had won over the degraded Jacobinical French. There is before me, as I write, a pamphlet, an exquisite satire upon the vainglorious assurance that marked the Prussians then; that marks them to-day! It is entitled a "Free, True and Particular Account of the Conquest and Partition of France," with a brief sketch of the "Triumphal Entry into the City of Paris" of the Prussian Princes. The humour is so fresh and terse

that it might have been written but yesterday ; and though the proclamations that it parodies are a century old, we shall not have to think very hard to find others of our own that they resemble as closely as they did the original. Let me give some at random. First, let us take the account given of the main engagement. It chronicles the rout of the French and says :—

“ Every third man of the French prisoners was put to death, by order of the King of Prussia, who in his great mercy and humanity was willing to spare even two-thirds of these abominable reptiles, although they had conspired against the sacred liberty and the safety of His Most CHRISTIAN MAJESTY, THE BEST OF KINGS !

“ The Combined forces amounted to no more than seventy thousand effective men, of which thirty thousand were cavalry. The Rebel army consisted of nearly two hundred thousand men, with the addition of fifty thousand cavalry ; but these on the appearance of the Royal Imperial and Emigrant Forces—

‘ Like a dewdrop on the lion’s mane,  
Were shook to air ! ’

“ No sooner was the Rebel Army discomfited than the Duke of Brunswick proceeded to Challons, Rheims, and Soissons ; all of which



cities he immediately reduced to ashes on account of their rebellious inhabitants ; men, women, and children, were very properly put to the sword, and 140 patriots broke upon the wheel."

It reads—does it not?—almost exactly like one of the Kaiser's own proclamations. But let the author continue :—

"After a few days employed in this honourable and necessary vengeance the *Magnanimous* King of Prussia, *Illustrious* Duke of Brunswick, the *Immortal* Conde, the *Gallant* Artois, the *Invincible* Bourbon, and the *Sapient* Monsieur led on their victorious troops to the gates of Paris."

The "Heroic Band of Illustrious and Magnanimous Commanders, each himself a host," then enter Paris and the long-deluded and mistaken people hailed on every side their true liberators, and "wept their past offences with bitter anguish and remorse." To punish, however, in a small degree their numerous outrages and horrible misdeeds, the Duke of Brunswick wisely permitted his troops to "enjoy a three days' pillage," etc. A little later we read that "two English republicans have been seized at Calais and their right hands cut off. The propriety of this punishment must strike all persons" ; that "the



Prussian and Austrian troops punish all the suspected rebels by pillage and murder. By degrees, however, there can be little doubt but these brave defenders of France will moderate their zeal"; and finally that "one hundred members of the National Convention were burnt alive and six thousand rebels hanged, so that tranquillity will soon be restored to this long-distracted country."

That, slightly exaggerated, was the sort of stuff on which they fed the hopes of Prussia a hundred odd years ago; it is very like the pabulum, it seems to me, that is served up to that unteachable people nowadays when the arms of Prussia are represented as everywhere victorious; when Ostend is called "Kales," and the black eagle was said to float over Paris. But though it did for the Prussians then, as now, it could not be made to do for poor Frederick William II., and when the Duke of Brunswick's army returned, decimated by disease, without clothes, and starving, a broken, spiritless rabble, the poor King must have seen at last in this wreck of the great army of his predecessor the utter and abject failure of his reign. He was now prematurely old and so infirm through the unrelieved sensuality in which he wallowed that they talked openly of making him abdicate. The

Countess Lichtenau alone was permitted to come near him. The Queen, the royal Princesses, even his own son, were excluded from the palace, where virtually he was a prisoner with a wanton as his gaoler.

It is good to know that such a life did not last long. One cold November day he fell into a shivering fit and took to his bed. He died in great agony. Every quack and charlatan in Western Europe hurried to Potsdam, but neither they nor the doctors could give him even a minute's relief. They say his remorse at the end was terrible to witness; that he cursed his life and wept bitterly at the misery he had allowed to be inflicted on his people, whom, to do him justice, he loved. But there were none to comfort the poor wretch. The infamous Reitz and a few French servants, who upbraided him for the trouble he had given them, were the only persons present at the end. So he passed away, the man who in eleven short years of sloth and indulgence had undone the life-work of a Titan.

## CHAPTER VII.

It is not a little significant of the change which came over the court, immediately upon the King's decease, that the first act of the new sovereign was to have the "unspeakable Reitz woman" laid by the heels. No sooner had his father's death been certified than, with true Prussian directness, he sent along a captain and a file of soldiers, who promptly removed the inconsolable Countess from the death-chamber, and carted her off *sans* ceremony to the castle of Grobau. The actual charge, if I remember aright, was that of stealing the royal jewels, but as many of these were even then decorating the royal corpse it was probably only a pretext for striking at a woman whom the new King, more even than any of his subjects, had good cause to hate. The money that had been lavished on "Mrs. Reitz" had left the Crown Prince short of necessaries. He had grown up, this heir of the proud Hohenzollern, on such a beggarly allowance that

he and his brothers frequently rose hungry from the table. His mother was herself in such acute financial straits that for days together she did not see her children, and they were left to the care of an amiable tutor named Bensch, described to us as an invalid and a misanthropist who suffered acute agony from spasms in the stomach, and was probably, therefore, not likely to take a very indulgent view of the shortcomings that even royal children possess. Frederick William III. had, in fact, as miserable a bringing up as even his ancestor Fat William could have desired. His father, for all his vices, had not been an unkindly man; but his father never saw him. His mother was more often closeted with money-lenders than her children, and the boy grew to manhood ignorant, unfriended, and uncouth—with a positive hatred (says Mirabeau) of his father, and a determination to avenge himself on the Reitz camarilla that, after all, is not to be wondered at. On the whole, therefore, while it would perhaps have been more dignified for him to have bowed his father's mistress politely out of doors, one cannot be surprised that the young King clapped her promptly in gaol, and certainly the act had a most salutary effect.

For the new King was emphatically a severe moralist. He rivalled, in his enthusiasm for purity, that Mikado of Japan who—

“Did decree, in words succinct,  
That all who flirted, leered or winked  
(Unless connubially linked),  
Should forthwith be beheaded.”

He was as inveterate an anchorite as his father was a debauchee, and he caused it to be known that his arrest of the Reitz woman was an outward and visible sign of the new order of things in Berlin and the court. It was certainly time that a change was effected. Under the reign of his father, that easy-going voluptuary, morality had fallen to a deplorably low ebb. Not only the capital, but the whole country, had been corrupted. According to an anonymous writer, whom Mr. Hodgetts quotes with some reserve, even the peasantry were tainted and given to all sorts of vices, while “noble ladies of rank debase themselves as agents of vice for others: attracting young married and unmarried women of good standing to their houses in order to lead them to ruin.”

Prussia, in fact, was at its lowest ebb, and when the new sovereign headed something

in the nature of a purity crusade he rendered a distinct service to his people. In place of the prolonged orgies and the carefully rehearsed scenes of dissipation that had marked the court, children's parties and pageants, tiresome, no doubt, but still innocent, became the order of the day. It was no longer fashionable to be openly vicious. Everyone became extremely respectable and highly sentimental. From being a cesspool of vice, Berlin became like a dull copy of Miss Twinkleton's academy. The Prussians are adepts at these quick changes that, outwardly at all events, are so convincing. To parody a popular refrain: "When majesty says turn, then they all turn." Their nation, in fact, has been little more than a blank sheet of paper for the noble House of Hohenzollern to write upon it what it chose—now vice, now virtue, now peace and universal disarmament, now militarism and perpetual war. Perhaps this change was no more sincere than the others, but at least it lifted the nation out of the ignoble rut in which its strength and resources were being frittered away.

But, alas! in other respects the King acted with no such decision. Treitschke, that somewhat bizarre romanticist, who

contrived to get himself regarded as a serious historian, declared that he was "a thorough German both in manner and uncouthness," and if the latter be the supreme test of Germanic virtue, then indeed, as we shall see, the new King possessed it in a high degree, for he was awkward, shy, and diffident beyond expression. True, he was brusque, and his habit of making rude speeches reduced poor Countess Voss almost to tears, but his *brusquerie* was, I fear, the disguise of a man who seeks to hide his cardinal weakness under a show of strength. "It was," says Treitschke, "indescribably hard for him to form a resolution; he delayed, reflected, allowed things to slip, was long suffering of what he disliked because he had not sufficient confidence in his judgment." We must add to this the fact that his exaggerated dread of pain left him the victim of every impudent impostor, every sturdy vagrant who waylaid him in the street, and that he had a strain of melancholia pervading his whole nature, so pronounced as to approach insanity. It is the pathetic fate of the Hohenzollern that almost throughout their line they divide themselves into types. The first, like Fat William and Frederick the Great—so dissimilar in many



respects—impose their wills, roughly speaking, on anyone and everyone. The second, just as dissimilar in other respects (who could be more unlike each other than the royal bigamist and his ascetic son ?), yet agree in this: that they are the creatures of the dominant personalities around them. In the whole line of the Hohenzollern we shall not find, I venture to think, one man who was not either a puppet or a tyrant; either weak to the point of being irresponsible and decadent, or so ruthless and imperious as to become that most dangerous of lunatics—a confirmed [ego]maniac!

Frederick William III. was, so far as his domestic affairs were concerned, largely under the influence of his wife, whom I cannot help thinking responsible, at all events in some respects, for the pensive melancholy which oppressed the spirits of her good husband. Not that she lacked either liveliness or charm. She was, in fact, the life and soul of the court, and achieved immediate popularity with the people, who worshipped her even before she came to the throne. "The Crown Princess," says the ubiquitous Voss, "has a beautiful figure; her appearance is both dignified and charming; everyone who

sees her feels irresistibly drawn and attached to her." And, like the Princess in the fairy tale, she was not only beautiful, but virtuous. Frederick William III., who, truth to tell, was somewhat of a stick, hated court functions even more than he did the theatre, and conceived the idea that nothing but a prayer-meeting ought to take him away from the somewhat dull fireside where he snoozed comfortably every evening before calling the servants into family prayers preparatory to retiring. All this must have been pretty poor fun for the young Queen, who, let it be said in fairness to her, did her utmost to enliven the gloom that had settled over her husband's spirit. Perhaps all would have been well if the Queen would have foregone her anticipations of a more exuberant life, and settled down, like another Charlotte, to cutting bread and butter.

But, alas ! a serpent was about to enter the domestic Eden, in the person, says the good Voss, of Prince Louis Ferdinand, "whose passionate nature sought, for a moment, to gain an influence over the noble and virtuous mind of the Crown Princess." I cannot help thinking, for reasons that will be presently apparent, that the efforts of Prince Louis were some-

what more protracted than von Voss indicates, and that they led to no small amount of domestic friction. Certain it is that the said Prince Louis must have been a very consummate scoundrel. For, to quote again from the virtuous Voss, when "the Crown Princess made it impossible for him to approach her, he sought to effect this by a stratagem. He began by gaining the young Princess Louise, and this was easily done. Only fifteen years old, and in no way resembling her royal sister, she was utterly wanting in the earnestness, the depth of character," etc., which, says Voss, "marked the future Queen." "Above all, she was very susceptible to flattery"; which we are to infer, presumably, her sister was not! What followed precisely on Prince Louis Ferdinand's advances the discreet Voss does not tell us. Her Royal Highness was not communicative, and Voss had to pass a sad time "before I succeeded in really winning my Princess's confidence, and drawing near to her." By that time, of course, the affair of Prince Louis had been forgotten, for, following this winter amour, the Prince and Princess went in the spring to Potsdam, "and this *at once* put an end to the machinations of evil men." But, alas! at Potsdam, after the royal couple's

accession to the throne, the serpent appeared again in the person of Alexander I. of Russia, with whom the Queen carried on a flirtation that her apologists insist was of the most innocently platonic description. I fear, however, that all this added greatly to that strain of melancholia in the King's nature to which I have referred. It was not only that he loved the Queen: only in her presence could he shake off the heavy cares and terrors that at once oppressed and startled him, that were always taking new shapes, each pointing to his downfall and that of Prussia.

His wife, in fact, was as necessary to him as was the gaiety in which she plunged to her; and the flirtations that she enjoyed were gall and wormwood to his dejected spirit, that saw the worst in everything, and could face no situation with hope, let alone confidence. The King, in fact, became gloomier as his consort got brighter; the habit of indecision ate into his soul as he sat for hours hugging his doubts and unable to make up his mind, till he developed a querulousness at home that kept his children at arms' length, and a rudeness in society that was remarkable even in the Hohenzollern. He became, in fact, a brooding hypochondriac, incapable of initiative, a prey to *maladie du*

*doubt*, which, for monarchs and statesmen, is the worst form of insanity.

All this, of course, would matter very little to us or to history but for the fact that the Hohenzollern have a far graver importance than their personalities always merit. In effect—and save for one brief period of the nineteenth century—the Hohenzollern are Prussia, which Lord Rosebery has told us is the mahout astride of that tame elephant Germany. Prussia rises and Prussia falls according to the genius or incapacity, the energy or sloth, of this one particular family, through whose generations runs the vicious taint of an hereditary insanity. At the time of which I am writing the Hohenzollern and Prussia were at their lowest. The qualities that poor Frederick William lacked were the very qualities most needed. Europe was at the supreme crisis of her struggle with Napoleon. Austria was seeking to form from the Germanic states a new coalition against the aggressive and domineering Republic of France—a coalition that seemed indispensable if their independence was to be preserved. There were two courses for Prussia to take: one was to join the Austrian coalition, as she was urged to do by all the fervour which the House of Hapsburg

could put forward; the other was to accept frankly the alliance that France offered her. She did neither. She entered on a course as spiritless as it was short-sighted. She began to drift, and to wait for the turn of affairs. German patriotic writers have not been slow to urge that this fatal policy of procrastination was due to the machinations of Lombard, the only minister of any ability whom the weak King and his weaker Foreign Secretary, Haugwitz, could rely upon. I think it more than probable that we have the real explanation in that inability to arrive at a decision, which is as symptomatic of insanity as the grossest delusions. In any case, Prussia vacillated. The Fürsten-Bund—the union of German sovereign princes—went to pieces. Napoleon secured the Rhine provinces, and became virtually the over-lord of Germany.

But worse was to follow. Napoleon seized the Duc d'Enghein from Baden, and Hanover called on the German Emperor to demand redress, while a storm of protest rose through Europe. Early in 1805 all the great powers—Russia, Austria, Sweden, and Britain, all the powers save Prussia—had agreed with each other to expel the French from North Germany. But Frederick William again hesi-



tated and again refused to join the alliance which Napoleon proposed to him. At last, under constant pressure and with the fear of ruin ever before his eyes, Frederick William III. joined the allies with 180,000 men—and within a month sought again to back out of the agreement! While he was yet hesitating there came news of the battle of Austerlitz, and of the smashing victory of the French. At once the pitiable trimmer, trimmed again. Haugwitz was sent to Napoleon with a congratulatory message and terms of submission. Prussia received Wesel, Neuchatel, Anspach, and Cleves, and was to get Hanover from England, only to learn a year later that Napoleon intended to take it from her, and to incur at his hands, when she resisted, the smashing defeat of Jena—a defeat that laid her army in the dust and reduced her to the level of a province.

The story of Jena is vividly illustrative of the vacillation of the King, who made the disaster possible. On the night before the battle the King held his last council of war. The veteran Duke of Brunswick, it is on record, soon fell asleep and snored loudly. Perhaps the sound caused the others to disperse. In any case, the party soon broke up. When Blücher sought to see the



King, His Majesty had retired "and was not to be disturbed." All was peace, and next morning, when a thick fog covered the landscape, the great Prince Hohenlohe opined that no fighting of any consequence would take place that day. Presumably the Prussian staff thought that the French were too well-bred to go against the opinion of a Crown Prince. Yet, notwithstanding, their west wing was soon desperately engaged, at two places their front was broken, and a little later their retreat became a rout. The poor King came within an ace of being taken prisoner, and had to fight with drawn sword for his life. The Queen fled to Weimar—and Prussia was in ashes.

Those were evils days indeed for the Hohenzollern. The royal pair were fugitives. From Stettin they fled to Küstrin, and thence to Königsberg, where Queen Louise had typhoid and nearly died. Suddenly the news came that the French were advancing. The Queen, determined never to be taken alive, drove, ill as she was, for three days and nights through the surf of the Baltic coast, sometimes over its ices.

Through all this the poor King cuts the sorriest of figures. The Queen arrived at Memel a stricken, bedrabbled wreck of a



SILHOUETTE GROUP OF FREDERICK WILLIAM II. AND FAMILY.



woman, whom typhoid and misfortune had reduced to a very shadow of her former brilliant self. But even the most thorough-going of his apologists are constrained to admit that the King had so little initiative, so little *geist* or energy, that he could make no suitable arrangements—indeed, no arrangements at all—for her reception. She and the King had to live in one room in a badly built log hut. The King's ministers had to sleep packed five in a room, with two beds between them, and to take it in turns to repose on the floor. They were only stopped from violent quarrelling by the vicinity of the Queen, whose pluck and good humour sparkled like a rare jewel through the murk of this misfortune. But the poor King could, alas! affect no cheerfulness. To such a pass had his indecision and vacillation led him! One wonders, indeed, that any advocate for absolutism can be found after the abject, pitiable failure of the principle which poor Frederick William III. so vividly illustrates. He was a good man, a virtuous husband, an attentive father—all excellent things, by no means to be made light of. But he was as incapable of facing a great emergency, of judging shrewdly and acting firmly, as he was of

writing another "Hamlet" or of giving the world statuary that should rival Michael Angelo's.

It is folly to blame kings for these things. We do not blame the average costermonger that he cannot give us Murillos, or expect a cabman to write operas like Wagner. They are ordinary men doing ordinary work that they find sufficiently exacting. And the ordinary King—though he is called the Most Supreme Highness and all the rest of it—is as far removed from the higher flights of statesmanship as ordinary men are from those of art.

But the Hohenzollern will have none of this levelling doctrine. Their faith in absolutism remains unshaken. To-day the Kaiser over-rules his trained and experienced Generals in a vain attempt to capture Calais that they warn him must fail, and thousands and tens of thousands of his men perish vainly on the battle-field! Bad as his failure is, it is not so pathetic as was that of his poor ancestor whom we are considering, and who lacked not merely insight and judgment, but firmness, energy of will, and power of decision. Yet he was, by virtue of the absolutist principle, still the one man who controlled the destinies of Prussia, the one man who cast the

die for peace or war, and all the time he was less capable of deciding that or any grave issue than the poorest subject within his realm. Think of him on that memorable day at Tilsit, as he sits wet through and hunched up on his horse, trying to catch some phrase, some word even, that Alexander of Russia is saying to Napoleon. The two autocrats are seated facing each other on the famous raft in the middle of the Memel, settling over the heads of their subjects, and of Frederick also, the terms upon which they can "adjust" Europe to their liking. The interview lasted three hours, and all the time the King of Prussia is in attendance, shivering on horseback, vainly trying to surmise from their attitudes or expressions what they have decided. There was no blacksmith in Russia, no ostler in France, who would have cut a figure at once so futile and so pitiable as this King. Or, again, let us look for a moment at the diary of Countess Voss. What a picture of the Köenirg man we get. "The poor dear King is so desponding," she says. "They" (his Allies) "will be beaten, and then all will be over." That was his constant cry, and when reverses came, as they do in every campaign, he turned on those about him,

who with braver hearts and heads less clouded had dared to hope, and rebuked them for their faith. A poor, spiritless parody of a King this; a very travesty of the man for whom the occasion called!

What makes his failure so ludicrously diverting is that Prussian historians and professors have succeeded, not merely in representing, but in making the world believe, that in reality it was Prussia and her King who led Europe against Napoleon and broke the mighty power of that scourge of kings. You will find this pleasing superstition crop up again and again in the history books—not all of them written by Prussians, but many of them written, like so much else, under Prussian inspiration.

Mr. Poulteney Bigelow, in his interesting account of Germany's struggle for freedom, echoes the legend. Probably nine Englishmen out of ten have heard and vaguely believe that after all it was Prussia who was mainly instrumental in settling "Boney's hash." Did not Blücher finish the business at Waterloo, and were not the Prussians with the army that the great Frederick founded among the Corsican's sturdiest opponents? The idea has passed into currency now; almost everybody accepts



it in some form or another, and once that has happened facts and argument count for very little. Yet what do the facts show? That Prussia, through the hesitancy, the cowardice, and the vacillation of her King, actually helped Napoleon! It was her failure to support the Austrian coalition in 1804 that made Austerlitz possible; it was the complete and utter collapse of her own pitiable army at Jena that set the seal on Bonaparte's great triumph. The arms of Austria, though they suffered many reverses, bore on the Continent the heat and burden of the day. Her statesmen and generals, unwise, unready, were yet consistent and courageous. They had fought France almost incessantly ever since the Revolution, and they ceased to fight her only when her armies were pulverised. But, poor Prussia! have we not seen her King of threads and patches, unable to resolve on a definite course of action and to hold it; unable even to know his own mind for two weeks together; now leaning on Austria, then on France, and yet, later on, on Russia, whose Emperor alone saved Prussia from absolute destruction, and then only at the price of her surrendering practically all her territories save Brandenburg and Silesia. Yet has the world been hoccussed

into the belief that the man who not merely accepted but begged for that arrangement, who declared war and sued for peace almost in the same breath—that it was he who, with Pitt, led Europe in the struggle against Napoleon! So great is the power of bluff, so proficient are the Prussians in its practice!

If we turn from the glow of Prussian romanticists masking as historians to the cold reality of the case, we shall find that such resistance as Prussia offered Napoleon was due not to the chivalrous and sublime Hohenzollern; it was spontaneous, and came from the people, crystallising round Stein, Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, three of the ablest men that Prussia ever produced—men whom, we may be pretty certain, would never have had their chance had the blight of the Hohenzollern still laid upon the land when they arose. Prussia's dynasty was at its weakest, and her King was virtually dethroned when, by a strange irony, eloquent indeed of the paradox that runs through her history, her people found at last opportunity to develop and to express their natural consciousness—opportunity to organise, to interchange opinion, and to meet upon a basis of citizenship. Every tradition of Prussian patriotism and free-

dom, every hero who is really received by the common people, dates back to this, the heroic age of Prussia, when Napoleon, whose dominion pressed so hard upon the people, saved them from the intolerable *régime* of the dynastic family, with its absolutism, its harshness, its pedantic brutality, its frank insistence and exaltation of force. The yoke of the foreigner was not so deadening as the heavy hand of the hide-bound Junker; and Jahn, the great patriot of the Prussians, contrived, despite the rigour of Napoleonic espionage, to carry out the gymnastic propaganda, that did so much to rouse the sluggish spirit of the nation. Poor Jahn! he lived to see the Napoleonic despotism broken and the Hohenzollern back on the throne and in power, and to be put in prison by the very rulers he had laboured to restore. Patriotism fares badly under the Hohenzollern. Even with so mild a specimen as the poor King we have been writing of—a king who was genuinely kind-hearted and shrank from giving pain—the free expression of opinion was dangerous, and soon landed one in trouble, probably in prison. The shadow of the jack-booted officer standing ready with drawn sword was over everything. And as then, so to-day; the same

army that keeps the Hohenzollern secure on the throne, keeps the people supine at its feet, until their soul is crushed and their energies find an outlet only in tyrannising over others.

Even before the Hohenzollern power had been restored, while yet Stein, Scharnhorst, and Gneisenau were striving to re-awaken the patriotism of the people so as to reform the Government, and restore to the army some of its lost efficiency, even then the reformers found every obstacle placed in their way at court, and realised bitterly—as many German statesmen have since—that despotism means government by a *camarilla*. There is a bitter and a manly letter extant in which Stein places his resignation before the feeble King, led now here now there by his insistent and irresponsible advisers; the Tapers and Tadpoles of his court, who were ever at his elbow, whispering in his ear every minute. “Things,” he complained, “things of the greatest importance, are read and discussed in the family circle; very many of less importance are talked over at tea in the evening; the drawing-room of the Countess von Voss is never empty of visitors. Officers, men of business, people of all sorts and conditions, make their appear-

ance there ; how is it possible, with such arrangements, to keep anything secret ? In this way the most important matters become common knowledge . . . Insignificant women are able to name the persons whom I have proposed as Ministers of Finance of the Interior, just at a time when it is of the utmost importance that my share in all this should remain a secret. It is therefore necessary that the court should consist only of persons of unimpeachable integrity and of perfect discretion, who are really worthy of being in the *entourage* of the monarch."

Alas ! the letter availed Stein nothing. Two days later his resignation was accepted and the greatest statesman that Prussia had ever known was sacrificed to a pitiable court intrigue and to the pride of the ruling family.

These were the difficulties—difficulties of a sort that break men's hearts—against which the reformers of Prussia laboured. They persevered only in the strong and natural hope that, once the Napoleonic yoke had been broken, it would be impossible to resist their demands—demands that were just and moderate to a degree. They desired merely that the man who was compelled to fight for his own country, because he was a citizen, should have a citizen's rights ; should be

permitted to have some control of local affairs, and at least a voice in imperial matters. The absolutism of the house of Hohenzollern was to be broken at last and a Parliament, however limited in scope and authority, ceded to the people under a free constitution. But they reckoned without their host. When the settlement with Napoleon came at last, when the army that Scharnhorst had raised and the people whom Stein had inspired finally broke Napoleon's power, when the time had come for pressing their demands with increased vigour, new and unexpected difficulties rose to perplex them.

The King had entered on another phase. The Queen was dead and her consort was plunged in a state of melancholia very faintly distinguishable from madness. Even when flushed with the victory of Waterloo and the still more remarkable territorial gains which the allies conceded Prussia—gains which but for the ceaseless preparations of Stein, Scharnhorst, and their colleagues, would never have been secured—he shrank from the *fête* that Berlin had prepared in his honour. When he found it was unavoidable, he gave instructions that it should be made as sombre as possible, and finally entered the city at the head of his



troops at an hour when most of the citizens were in their beds. A man charged with this pensive melancholy was as little likely to favour a bold scheme of domestic reform as he was to act vigorously against the foreign aggressor, and though poor Frederick William III. was got to promise a constitution to his people, he never could be made to fulfil the promise. I have little doubt, so great was the vacillation and weakness of his character, that had his subjects "bluffed" and grumbled enough, or begun to organise even the pretence of a revolution, the King would have succumbed. But the Prussian is not an imaginative person, and the shadow of the "White Terror" lay over Europe. Moreover, the King got more difficult as time went on. Though his indecision remained, his austerity of virtue relaxed. He began to display, when past middle age, some of the inclinations and tastes that in youth he had frowned on, and though he remained as lonely a man as ever (nay, lonelier, for the one person who could thaw his frigid heart lay dead), he used to absent himself from the family circle to seek his relaxation in the society of *danseuses* and actresses who began to enliven the tedium of his evenings. He revelled in polonaise



balls and *déjeuners dansants*, in private theatricals and ballets, and to cultivate the friendliest relations with the artistes. Mdlle. Caroline Bauer, whose memoirs describe the King as still stately and handsome, touches with great candour on his liking for the society of these ladies, though she adds a rider to her observations that deserves, in fairness to the King, to be quoted in full. "In spite," she asserts, "of this openly pronounced liking for Mdlle. Lenière on the part of His Majesty, and despite his great influence over her, he never had any amorous intrigue with the bold dancer, or with any other artiste, nay, very likely, no impure love affairs at all. At least, so his private chamberlain Turin asserted, adding, 'His Majesty is far too shy for such a thing, and the memory of his never-to-be-forgotten Louise prevents that.' " And, indeed, there is no doubt that the King cherished a deep affection for her. When, after his last sleep, they took off the secret case of the order of the Black Eagle, they found his wife's likeness on his breast, and her rooms were kept always in the same state as when he had seen her last. Perhaps the inconsolable widower sought some distraction in 'these gaities for his grief, and some escape from

harpies and whisperers who constantly beset him. It was a relief to the King of Prussia, always the victim of the last clever pleader who gained his ear, to chat with people who did not seek to convert him to some policy or reconcile him to some job. "The theatre," he used to say a little pathetically, "is the one place where I can think without being interrupted."

After a time the King sought other relaxations and other modes of protecting his royal privacy. He concluded, I regret to record, a morganatic marriage with Auguste, the daughter of Count Harrach. The story goes that the step was taken on the advice, or rather by the insistence, of the King's physician, who told him that only constant bright feminine society would save him from the melancholia that, despite the *danseuses*, the theatricals, and everything else, still pursued him like a ghost, whose spirit cannot be laid. I do not know if this be the true reason. If not the lady herself, with her bright eye and winsome smile, will very easily pass for one. Frederick William had the morganatic ceremony performed so quickly that Turin had to borrow a wreath from one of the *première danseuse*! The fair Auguste was made a princess and presented to the court

with extreme awkwardness by her elderly and embarrassed lover, hitherto the champion of a rigorous monogamy. At first, there was furious hostility to the lady. She was described as artful, designing, and unchaste, and her power of intrigue and its effect on Prussian policy was dreaded. "We are in for another Reitz epoch," said the Jeremiahs of the court, and they joined to the outraged virtue of the mothers and the fiery envy of the daughters their own lamentations. One cannot be surprised. Given absolutism, the appearance of a new mistress for the sovereign becomes an event of public concern. It may change the whole policy of an empire or affect the destinies of a race; whereas with a limited monarchy—but I am, of course, exceeding the bounds of probability. Constitutional monarchs are nearly all married, and, as the late W. S. Gilbert told us, "Married men never flirt!"

At all events, in the case I am describing, the fears of the moralists were groundless. Whether selected by himself or the physicians, Auguste was a good choice. She did not intrigue, she did not "job." She was tactful, quiet, and modest, and very soon became popular even with the King's own family. She made the court wear Parisian

fashions, and caused the King to smile at dinner. In a word, she was a success. And of her devotion to the King there can be no doubt whatever. To oblige him she ceased to be a Roman Catholic, and became a Protestant. When we remember the extreme seriousness with which all royal persons regard religion we may surmise the depth of her affection, an affection that, quite seriously, did much to dissipate that leaden cloud that still hung so heavily on his spirits.

Alas ! even Auguste and the Paris fashions were not to be proof against the melancholy that at last claimed the King. With the approach of the year 1840 some of the scribes of the Berlin press began to dwell on the significance of the number forty. In 1640 it appeared the "Great Elector" acceded to his place, owing, of course, to the death of his father. In 1740 Frederick the Great succeeded Fat William. What was going to happen in 1840 ? The idea would never have affected a robust mind. It preyed on the King, however. He fell ill, and was soon convinced that his death was near, and when rumours got about that the White Lady of the Hohenzollern had been seen again at the castle, he became convinced that he was

a doomed man. His spirits sank and were never rallied. He kept reiterating that he would die. The cold that had seized on him became a fever, and getting weaker and weaker he sank into a senile decrepitude, certain of nothing but his own end. It must have been a relief to him when at last it came; when at last the King who had eluded Napoleon and lived through the break-up of his country succumbed to the number forty—and to the “White Lady!”

## CHAPTER IX.

It is one of the delightful idiosyncracies that mark the truly agreeable family with which these pages are concerned that, almost without exception, the head of the house of Hohenzollern is found to be at variance with his eldest son. Fat William, as we have seen, came within an ace of killing his son Frederick, and, finding that impossible, imprisoned him in Küstrin, allotting (so his daughter tells us) fourpence a day for his keep. Frederick himself had no son, but the nephew who succeeded him, the famous bigamist, whose amours we have recorded, was made to feel the weight of his royal displeasure and to listen to frequent expressions of the royal contempt; and he himself died hopelessly estranged from that moody ascetic, Frederick William III., whose gloom and indecision proved as costly to Prussia as the reprehensible excesses of his father. Similarly, by a strange irony, Frederick William IV. was barely on speaking terms with his father when that ruler breathed his last. We might continue the list of

dissensions down to our own day. Have we not heard of the "Prince's Party" even during this very war? Of attacks in the Berlin press inspired by that delectable Crown Prince, now so generally admired, on his father, the Kaiser? And, going back a generation, was not Frederick III. the beloved "Unser Fritz" of the army, at constant variance with his father, the old drill-sergeant, who himself took his orders from Bismarck? It is even so! From generation to generation, and from age to age, the members of the noble House of Hohenzollern have been at each other's throats. They have inflicted many gruesome injuries on other dynasties and upon mankind. But that is nothing to the envy, malice, and uncharitableness that they have borne each other, and from old Fat William downwards, disagreements and strife have rent the august family.

In the case of Frederick William IV. it is not very difficult to discover the root of the differences between his father and himself. The Prince was an impossible person. Those of the predecessors on whose eccentricities we have touched are each and all of them suspect of insanity. This particular Hohenzollern had it proved against him







FREDERICK WILLIAM IV.

without any possible probable shadow of doubt, so clearly, in fact, that even the long-suffering placemen of the court were moved to recognise that the insanity of this particular member of the royal family exceeded all bounds and must be summarily dealt with ; the result being, of course, that he was consigned, after some twenty years of irresponsible pottering with the destinies of his people, to an asylum, where he shortly succumbed. You and I, dear reader, will agree, I think, that had the same expedient been earlier adopted with certain of his ancestors, the gain to mankind would have been considerable. But in the matter of kings, and especially of this line of kings, caution is pre-eminently necessary, for as a well-known Conservative once remarked, " It is all very well certifying any particular royalty, who happens to be deranged, as a lunatic ; but after all one should be careful in doing so, for where are you going to draw the line ? "

In the case of Frederick William IV. all possibilities of other treatment had been exhausted before the dread step was forced upon his ministers. The King was by no means an uninteresting or disagreeable character, but from his boyhood upwards he had been distinctly a trial. The fact that his leading

traits bear, as we shall see, a very close resemblance to the characteristics of a later sublimity in the Hohenzollern monarchy, gives his personality a claim on our attention that we must not ignore. Frederick William IV. was by no means destitute either of brains or of good qualities. In fact, he had both to a far greater degree than that dull and decorous melancholic his father. But he had also one fatal disqualification which rendered him incapable of their directed exercise. "He had," says Mr. Hodgetts, in his book on "The House of Hohenzollern,"\* "he had what the Germans aptly term 'inconsequence!'" In his boyhood, he would be the victim of moods as sudden and variable "as the shade by the light quivering aspen made." He would pass from wild exhibitions of frantic joy—so his tutors tell us—to savage impatience and unmeasured rage. What was the result? His younger brothers and sisters were so severely pummelled, and they found his mercurial changes so difficult to support, that they used to organise a nursery boycott of the future King of Prussia and entirely refused to play with him, preferring to meet the full measure of his youthful rage and wrath to being

\* Methuen.

alternately caressed and jumped on. It used to be impossible for the Royal Sovereign and most Imperial family of the Hohenzollern to meet without Prince Carl exhibiting a bloody nose or a contused eye administered by brother William, whose paroxysms of rage got quite beyond control. Later on his brother William, who, whatever his limitations, did not lack sturdiness or courage, was withdrawn from the studies they were together pursuing because of the elder's violence of temper. And as with his playmates, so with his tutors. One after another were driven away by the royal firebrand. The Prince, unlike his taciturn father, was not a man of few words. He was voluble, not to say eloquent, to a degree, and he cultivated the habit of delivering speeches of torrential copiousness on the slightest provocation. He would swing from subject to subject and from question to question with a dexterity that amazed and perplexed his unfortunate tutors, who came to instruct the Prince, and found that they, their primers and lessons, were swept on one side, the while his highness turned some recondite subject inside out. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that one after another the distinguished men who had been

selected for the royal tuition sorrowfully departed. The Prince was beyond them. He read omnivorously, and his range of information was, admittedly, quite extraordinary. It may be that these early studies so overtaxed the brain as to impair its efficiency. It is impossible to say. But it looks very much as if even in his youth he gave some signs of that mental instability that later wrecked his life. It was his habit to frequent those *salons* in Berlin where intellectual conversation was the order of the day, and where theories for the regeneration of Society were propounded by "high-browed" philosophers. The Prince would listen for some time, as though profoundly interested. He would then indulge in some perfectly meaningless and absurdly irrelevant remark, which would send his cronies into convulsions of hilarious mirth, and, of course, terminate the discussion. He would then proceed to the next coterie and repeat the performance, greatly to the delight of his admiring friends. This sort of conduct was very noticeable in the Prince. If it did not raise any suspicion of his sanity it was because it was attributed to another failing that, I regret to say, was also early noticeable in the King—that undue indulgence in the grape of the vine which

was ere long to so weaken his mind that concentration became almost impossible, and the indecision, which as I have said manifests itself in all the negative types of the Hohenzollern, commenced to prey upon his vital strength.

Unfortunately, the time was one when indecision proved more than usually dangerous in sovereigns. The King ascended the throne in 1840—eight years before the crisis of 1848 convulsed Europe, and threatened the throne of Prussia; when, joining hands with the proletariat, the middle and professional classes demanded such a reform of her antiquated political system as would have left the country no longer under the absolutist Hohenzollern rule, or in the control of the narrow and purblind Junker sect. Unfortunately, the King, though, as I have said, a man of more than ordinary ability, was unable to see the wisdom and necessity of meeting the Reformers half way, and of conceding to them the constitution which his father had promised in 1815, with a Parliament that should effectually control the destinies of Prussia. He was obsessed with the wildest of mad notions that prevented him from seeing with any clearness at all the real significance of the situation.



Firmly implanted in his mind was the notion that there existed in Europe a band of international conspirators, who were desperately resolved on the overthrow of the existing social and political order of things, and who wanted to establish a world-wide Republic. When the *bourgeois* of Berlin demanded a municipal council that should administer the affairs of the city on business lines, he saw in this innovation the hand of the Red International. If it was pointed out that the public services or the army of Prussia were hopelessly inefficient, the same maleficent genius was at work. The King was, in fact, the last man to handle the situation that arose; not merely was he vexed with delusions as to strange secret societies that never existed outside the imaginations of penny-a-liners, but his mind was hopelessly out of touch with the trend of modern events. Everywhere there was a growing impatience for reform. Everywhere it was realised that *l'ancien régime* was doomed.

But the King was in one respect a true Hohenzollern. That family rules and can rule Prussia, and through Prussia, Germany, only on one basis—that of autocracy. Once give the people a real control over their own

destinies, once give them the opportunity of curbing the militarism on which the Hohenzollern despotism exists, and that dynasty will promptly disappear. It is by force, the overwhelming supreme force of the army, of the fighting machine, that they remain on the throne, and they are wise to refuse—indeed, to permit—any real measure of popular control in the empire, which, the sham Reichstag despite, is to-day as despotically governed as in the days of Frederick the Great! But to do his descendant justice, it was not only expedience that decided him to resist to the uttermost the sane and necessary reforms for which his subjects were pressing. The King was a sincere and ardent mediævalist. Like the present Kaiser in his “inconsequence,” in the mental restlessness that drove him to study first one subject and then another without mastering any; like him, also, in his habit of discoursing to the world at large about them all, he has this further most interesting trait for us, that he, like the present Kaiser, also believed emphatically in the divine right of kings, and regarded the cession of representative institutions as tantamount to his own suicide. The King firmly believed the absolutist principle that had made Prussia,

and incidentally his own family, what they were; and when, in 1849, the deputies of North Germany assembled at Frankfort-on-the-Main offered him the hereditary title of German Emperor he refused it on the ground that his title was and must be derived from God Himself! But none the less the indecision to which I have referred soon became apparent. Strongly as he believed in autocracy, he believed in keeping himself on the throne with even more fervour, and thus while he was in reality opposed to the demand for constitutional government, he commenced at a very early stage in its development to hedge. My opinion is, in fact, that he would have conceded the Liberals practically everything that they wanted but for a new, a remarkable, factor in Prussian politics. That factor was Bismarck.

Bismarck came to the front in Prussian politics in the nick of time for the noble House of Hohenzollern, and had his genius, courage, and consistency not been thrown on the side of absolutism, I do not doubt but that the Liberals would have won. It is certain that the Conservatives gained enormously from his accession. He proclaimed boldly and fearlessly that doctrine of the divine

right of kings, then generally discredited, and in which they were virtually ceasing to believe and at the same time he turned on the reformers all the merciless irony of his rare debating powers, subjecting their proposals to an unsparing analysis. Alas! they could not answer. It is always easier to speak from the Opposition side of things, and the Liberals suddenly found that from being the aggressors they had to defend their own propositions against the cut and thrust of Bismarck's fierce attacks. In our day, when we are familiar with the shortcomings and failures of the party system, and when we realise that, grave as they are, they are certainly preferable to that personal despotism which the Kaiser, almost alone among the sovereigns of Europe, is able to exercise, these attacks have lost much of their freshness. In those days they seemed irresistible. "The ballot box," said Bismarck, "is a lottery box. I am not going to have the fate of my country settled by a snatch division." He argued, wrongly no doubt, but still with immense force, that only autocracy could ensure to Germany that efficiency of which she stood in such need, and he demanded that if German unity were to be secured, then it must

be under the hegemony of Prussia, who would lead the North German states. In a word, he made it appear that the only possible way of cementing the innumerable small petty German states, each with absurd privileges and restrictions of its own, and of reconstituting Germany on a secure and efficient basis, was by preserving inviolate "that ancient Crown of Prussia" (it dated from 1700) on which he was for ever descending in his speeches. Given that, and he assured both Conservatives and Liberals the work of national reconstruction could commence at once.

The effect of Bismarck's insistence on the King is best illustrated by a story, which the statesman himself relates with grim humour. "I know how it will all end," the poor unbalanced King told him. "The mob will finish us—outside there by the Opera House. They will cut our heads off, depend on it; first yours, then mine!"

"*Et après, sire,*" answered the astute Bismarck.

"*Après?* We shall be dead, shall we not?"

Bismarck's reply was a masterpiece. They must die in any case, he tells the King. Better die fighting and worthily, than die as





EMPEROR WILLIAM I.



did Louis of France, after an abject and pitiable but unavailing surrender to the mob. At once the imagination of the royal hero was fired. He commenced to cut and thrust and parry with extraordinary gusto and realism, proclaiming what wonders he would perform on the field. Bismarck must have got out of the railway carriage—they were travelling at the time—with some relief, but complete satisfaction.

The result of Bismarck's domination—not merely of the King but of Prussian politics—we all know. It left the Hohenzollern despotism untouched. True, it gave the people a Parliament, but a Parliament that was powerless. True, it gave them votes, but the votes were worthless. The people had no leader with half the resource or acumen or determination of the Iron Chancellor, and the court and the Conservatives, who might have been frightened into giving them a valid constitution, were stayed by the strong man's forceful personality.

The King, in fact, had become as putty in Bismarck's capable hands, and the history of the Hohenzollern, and of Germany for at least another thirty-five years, until the present Kaiser came into his own, is the history of the man of "blood and iron," who,

*plus royaliste que le roi*, did for the Hohenzollern what it is certain that none of them, save the great Frederick, could have done for themselves. The necessary superiority to moral scruples which marked the tortuous and depraved diplomacy by which Bismarck worked for war, first with little Denmark, then with ramshackle, unready Austria, and lastly with a supine and decadent France—all, all of them entrapped into conflicts from which there could be but one issue; with the morality of that sort of statecraft our friends the Hohenzollern had long been familiar. But the genius, the confidence, the resource with which it was carried through—these were Bismarck's own. They had as little to do with the occupants of the throne as with the Reichstag that Bismarck delighted to checkmate.

Poor William I., perhaps the best of the whole of the Prussian royal family, was even more of a cipher in the hands of the Iron Chancellor than his lunatic brother. Bismarck's own memoirs bear eloquent, albeit unconscious, testimony to his extraordinary ascendancy over the King, the most empty of figureheads, who half-deceived Europe into thinking him a strong

man. "His wife has been at him," Bismarck's diary records (his wife dreaded wars, and had, besides, some ideas of international justice), "I must see him at once." And so the weak King is dragged along from act to act, that he distrusted and disliked, borne down by the enormous strength of the man who had as little regard for scruple in public matters as a forger has in the private affairs of his life. "I have no right to Holstein, you know," he would say to Bismarck, who doubtless thought the remark wholly irrelevant. He was, in fact, always annoying his counsellor by conscientious scruples that the great man must have regarded with supreme contempt. Thus, by a strange irony, it followed that some of the worst outrages that Prussia ever perpetrated upon Europe and mankind had their origin in the reign of the kindest, the best, and, so far as I know, the only normal member of the family who ever occupied the throne.

And yet it was under the inspiration of the greatest of all the Hohenzollern that Bismarck acted. He was, indeed, a faithful student of the great Frederick. Like him, he believed only in the supremacy of force ; like him, he believed that deceit is a legitimate

weapon of statesmanship ; like him, he believed that the weak had no rights. Consider for a moment the duplicity of the diplomacy that preceded the Franco-German War : how for years Bismarck protested, with his hand on his heart, that he had no designs on the peace of his neighbour, while, all the time, as his "Reminiscences" show us, he was preparing, planning, and perfecting the details of his attack on her. Again, consider the diabolic ingenuity with which he entrapped Denmark into the fight that he knew would be her ruin. His preparations were complete ; the Prussian army ready to strike at its tiny foe. Only one thing was necessary : the lamb must be got to face the wolf. And forthwith the rumour was set afloat, so that it could reach Danish ears, to the effect that if the Danes took the field Britain would support them. Has there been anything more infamous in the whole history of politics ? I could give other instances, instances galore. But *cui bono* ? I have said enough to show that, save in his private life, Bismarck was either abnormal or depraved (for it was only public affairs that he held to be outside morals). The Iron Chancellor was a true Hohenzollern. He was the spiritual descendant of that

Frederick the Great with whom we are at war ; the man who founded an empire whose law was to be force, whose word was to be a lie.

## CHAPTER IX.

So far we have experienced little difficulty in determining the salient characteristics of the various noble Hohenzollern whose doings have enlivened these sombre pages. It is always easy to moralise over dead men; in the first place, one has nearly all the facts about them at one's command; and secondly, they have realised all their possibilities, so far as this life is concerned, and, their bolt shot, the temptation to point out their shortcomings is almost irresistible. But with a man who is still alive the case is different. He may—as the Yankees say—“make good” at any minute. The inconsistencies that have been so baffling, the mistakes that have appeared so crude, all these may be redeemed by some master-stroke of clever policy on which the most detached observer had never reckoned. There is about man an element of the unexpected that makes him the most interesting of all the animals, and that, *inter alia*, makes

it very difficult to sum up on his life and achievements, "to point a moral or adorn a tale" anent them, while he is yet in the flesh. Hence it is that in writing of Kaiser William II., whose end is not yet, one should observe a degree of caution, of wariness even, that in the case of less complex personalities, the sum of whose achievements is before us, may not be necessary.

The popular portrait of the Kaiser is hardly a convincing one. Only recently I encountered it in the "serial" of a daily paper whose hold upon the million there is no disputing. The author depicted the War-Lord as demanding "Blood—more Blood" in the tones and with the fierceness that one associates with the utterances of a lunatic who has been consigned to the padded cell. Other attempts at dramatisations of the last of the Hohenzollern take rank with the cartoons and lampoons that we directed against Napoleon a hundred years ago. They are as obviously sincere and hearty in their hatred as they are unconvincing in their analysis of our enemy's aims and methods. I do not mean, of course, that the Kaiser resembles even faintly the great Emperor of the French. But neither does he correspond to that composite portrait of Jack the



Ripper and Dr. Crippen which, bringing out the ferocity of the one and the simulation of the other, masquerades as an exact likeness of the man who made the war.

If we are to arrive at the truth about the Kaiser we should do well to keep in mind a few fundamental facts that, incontestably established, should leave us in no doubt as to the real significance of a personality that seems as baffling as it is contradictory. First, there can be no question, I take it, that the Kaiser has a physical affliction, of which he must be reminded every day and every hour of the day. There seems no doubt whatever that his left arm is not normal. One does not know, of course, where exactly lies the seat of the trouble. Some say the arm is withered; some that the whole of the left side is paralysed. I cannot tell. Probably the truth is that the elbow-joint was dislocated at birth, and, owing to the weakness which there is no doubt attached to the young stranger when he appeared, the trouble could not be set right. One thing is certain: the Kaiser must feel that affliction whenever he eats, whenever he mounts his horse, or is helped on with his coat, or goes out to shoot, or takes a walk. I do not think it any very laboured reasoning

to deduce from this that the strain on his nervous system must be excessive. To a man who was content to lead a life largely of contemplation, and to find his pleasures in literature and those of the mind—to him, indeed, such an affliction might count but little. It is clear that the Kaiser does not possess that particular felicity of temperament. He is one of those men who must be up and doing; whose nature compels him to be for ever indulging in some sort of artificial activity; some kind of adventitious adventure with which virile personalities love to season life. Hunting, shooting, fishing—the Kaiser delights in them all; in reviewing his troops, in travelling at breakneck speed through his territory, in paying surprise visits to lonely parts of his kingdom, and in continually changing his plans and altering his carefully prepared itinerary. There is, I may say, no doubt upon this point. The Kaiser, in his own land, is known as William der Plötzliche (*i.e.* William the Sudden), and if there is anything certain about him, it is that he has earned the title. I do not say this to score a point against him. It would be folly to suggest that every man who does not resign himself to a mere vegetable existence,

who loves change and variety and experience, is unhealthy and decadent. But in the case of the Kaiser, living as he did this free, untrammelled existence, dashing first in one direction, then in the other, travelling one day to the outskirts of his possessions in Poland, there to pay a surprise visit to the garrison, and then coming back post haste to preside at the opening of a church in Berlin; such an affliction as lies in his left arm must be not a little serious. Every time the Kaiser changes his uniform (and they say that it is changed many times), every time that he signs a document, every time that he mounts a horse or sits down to table, he must be reminded sharply and definitely of his physical disability, and that must of itself react, and with tremendous force, upon his nervous system. I believe, in fact, that this particular affliction of the Kaiser has induced in him a chronic nervous irritability of which Europe and the world during the past twenty years have had abundant evidence.

We have only to consider for a moment in what the daily life of the Kaiser consists to realise that this diagnosis is based upon a realistic view of the facts. To an ordinary man, leading an ordinary life, and prepared

to adapt himself to the limitations that his misfortune imposes, it would, of course, be fantastic to suggest that this accident of the withered arm has had anything like a determining effect upon his character. But then the life of the Kaiser is, as we shall see, by no means an ordinary one. It knows nothing of repose, nothing of introspection. It is one of ceaseless activity, constant effort. The Kaiser is on the go all day long, and all day long the fret and pull of his left arm must tell, and tell heavily, upon his nervous system. In these matters nature will have her due. Napoleon, who cheated her of sleep for many years, lived to experience her vengeance at Waterloo, when, at the supreme moment of his fate, coma descended on him even as the battle rolled, first to one side, then the other. Similarly with the man we are considering. The fact that the Kaiser has a withered arm would matter little—if he were not the Kaiser, if he were content to rest, to lead a sedentary life, to find his pleasures in pursuits that entail some physical exertion. He is not; and, as I believe, the disability is one that has left its permanent mark upon his character, his habits, and upon that mental equipoise upon which, in an emperor, endowed virtually with absolute

powers, so much depends. It has left him a prey to irritability, to fretfulness, to capriciousness and mental instability which, I believe, have made him the most dangerous figure that our modern world has known.

Side by side with the accident of the withered arm, there is another fact of cardinal importance in connection with the Kaiser, which it is vital that we should keep clearly in mind if we are to arrive at a just decision upon this strange and baffling personality.

The Kaiser inherits to the full the Frederickian tradition of Prussian policy. He is the first true Hohenzollern that has ascended the throne of Prussia since Frederick the Great passed away. He believes profoundly in that personal direction of affairs, that ubiquity of inspection, that ever-present vigilance, which distinguished the sovereign whom the Kaiser loves to emulate, and which marks out the Kaiser from contemporary sovereigns to-day. The resemblance, indeed is in some respects ludicrous. If we take the words of the most impartial historian upon Frederick and apply them to the Kaiser we shall find that they fit exactly, until we come to the tribute that that historian is moved to pay to the genius and insight of the first-named sovereign.

“Frederick was not content,” says Macaulay, “with being his own Prime Minister ; he would be his own sole minister. Under him there was no room, not merely for a Richelieu or a Mazarin, but neither for a Colbert, a Loudovic, or a Torcy. A love of labour for its own sake, a restless and insatiable longing to dictate, to intermeddle, to make his power felt, a profound scorn and distrust of his fellow-creatures, made him unwilling to ask counsel, to confide important secrets, to delegate ample powers. The highest functionaries under his government were mere clerks, and were not often trusted by him as valuable clerks are often trusted by the heads of departments.”

Thus Macaulay on the Great Frederick. But surely the description might apply to a later Hohenzollern, to the ruler we have under discussion. Almost the first important act by which William the Sudden riveted the attention was to discharge the man who had unified Germany and made it strong, rich, and honoured—Bismarck—who was jettisoned almost as soon as the Kaiser felt at home on the imperial throne. Following Bismarck, who was extruded with every circumstance of dishonour, came Caprivi. He was thrown out—the words are really not



too strong—at a minute's notice. There followed him Prince Hohenlohe, and von Bülow; all were sacrificed to the imperious will of the War-Lord. Like Frederick the Great, the Kaiser rises early in the morning; like Frederick he expects his Chancellor to be with him at the dawn, to run through, however rapidly, the mass of correspondence that awaits him; to take his instructions and to execute his royal will in the manner that he directs; but, unlike Frederick, his is not a mind with a swift, strong, and intuitive grasp of detail, nor can he focus all his available mental reserves at a given point where they may be required. For there is another ancestor besides Frederick the Great whom the Kaiser resembles—that unhappy monarch Frederick William IV. whom we have described in these pages.

Like him, the Kaiser is the victim of “inconsequence.” Severe and sustained thought directed to one paramount issue—that is not in the Kaiser's line. With one foot in the stirrup he has another for ever either in the theatre, or the studio, or the music-room. He has written operas and he has produced plays. He has designed cartoons, and he has made speeches on almost every inconceivable topic. His is a



mind that, like his body, is congenitally incapable of attaining repose. The world has been accustomed to find him attempting something new each day. Almost every hour finds him with a new whim, a new desire, a new pretence of achievement. To-day, he is an architect, correcting the various plans that the members of that profession have designed for Berlin. To-morrow, he is showing the world how Wagner ought to be conducted. A third day, and he is compiling the menus of the restaurants. There has been nothing too trivial, nothing too vast, for the restless energy of his mind to grasp, and the amazed intelligence of the modern world has vainly tried to keep up with the kaleidoscopic changes that have followed with blinding swiftness one upon the other.

“ A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one but all mankind's epitome :  
Stiff in opinions, often in the wrong,  
Was everything by starts and nothing long.  
But in the course of one revolving moon  
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon ;

Blest madman, who could every hour employ,  
With something new to wish or to enjoy.  
Railing and praising were his usual themes,  
And both to show his judgment in extremes.  
So over violent or over civil  
That every man with him was God or devil.”

This was the man who sought to restore to the Government of Germany and of her

affairs that direct personal control which was objectionable enough under the iron sway of a great man, but which, with William the Sudden in the saddle, became a constant menace to the peace of the world. Side by side with the nervous irritability that followed inevitably on his withered arm was his ruthless determination to assert himself, to control things, to be the great directing force in the empire that he had inherited. These are, I believe, the dominant traits of the man we are considering—a fixed, resolute determination to be first, to lead in politics, in art, in science, and in war, coupled with a restlessness, a lack of concentration and an impatience that prevented him mastering any one of the subjects in which he set out to shine. Could there be a more dangerous combination?

Do I exaggerate? Let us turn to the facts of his life. Almost his first public act—an act that should have left us under no illusion regarding at least one of his qualities—was on that sad Sunday at San Remo, when he followed his father's corpse to the grave. We all remember how the world learnt next day that "the very perfect gentle knight," the German Emperor, had claimed precedence over his own mother

on the ground that he was the first person in the realm. That, of course, was the true Hohenzollern. "Crash your way through; assert yourself; be first"; that was the animating motive of the great Frederick; that is the inspiring motive with William the Sudden. It marked him out twenty-five years ago at his father's funeral, and it has distinguished him ever since. There has been no event in our modern world, no complication of recent politics, into which the Kaiser has not forced his way.

The Jameson raid of 1896 followed not long after his succession. It was an event with which Germany was not remotely concerned; an event which Bismarck, that wily diplomatist, would not have troubled to notice. We all remember the famous telegram that his "Most Supreme Highness" sent. Following hard upon that there came the Spanish-American War, another matter in which the German Empire had no direct concern. It was with difficulty that the Kaiser was restrained by Prince Hohenlohe from intervening actively on the side of—Spain! France concluded an agreement in regard to Morocco with ourselves, in which, said Prince von Bülow—a patriotic and

experienced German statesman if ever there was one—the Fatherland had no concern. But the Kaiser insisted on intervening, and on having Delcassé, the French Minister responsible, dismissed from his post. The Agadir incident, which brought Europe to the verge of war, was caused by the incurable itch which still affects the Kaiser—and his Generals—for intermeddling. “A love of labour for its own sake, a restless and insatiable longing to dictate, to intermeddle, to make his power felt.” Does not this actuate the Kaiser, just as it did his predecessor ?

There is, indeed, one difference. Frederick had genius; the Kaiser has not. Forceful cleverness, an alert, original mind, that undoubtedly is his. But the supreme qualities of statesmanship which the founder of the Prussian State possessed, obviously do not mark him out. He is as free from genius as he is, I believe, from the odious vices that stained Frederick’s soul. But he has in a high degree, first, the ruthless determination that Frederick possessed to be first, to control and to direct; and secondly, the irritable restlessness that marked the other ancestor I have mentioned, whose volatile nature led him finally,

as we have seen, to the asylum. That the Kaiser is in any danger of seeking that refuge I do not mean; but I am confident of this, that in these two traits we have the key to his character and, as I shall presently show, to his action in causing the present war.

First, let us try to gauge the effect which, upon a temperament so constituted, the restraints and etiquette of German court life is likely to have. The Kaiser is stated, by those who claim to know him well, to dread and loath the dull monotony of the ceremonial side of his existence. The wearisome repetition of meaningless titles, the lack of frank human intercourse, the cramping and hideous unreality of it all, are said to try him beyond endurance. A man of simple tastes and of quiet affections would find some refuge from these burdensome trammels in that home-life and family ties which other sovereigns contrive to keep for their own relief within the paralysing formalities of the court. But the Kaiser has not that equable character that allows even a King to find happiness with his children at the fireside. Whatever be the cause, whether the withered arm, as I suggest, be responsible, or some other factor, the Kaiser is

that kind of neuropath who requires constant change, constant excitement, constant stimulus. They say that Berlin has, under the rule and the direct encouragement of His Most Christian Majesty, become the most "advanced" night city in the world; that its nerve-rotting excitements and hectic vices transcend anything that could ever be charged against Paris under the Second Empire, or, for the matter of that, anything that is chronicled against Rome at its worst. With the wealth that has poured into the empire, the old love of Spartan simplicity that marked the German has gone. A restless craving for excitement has seized upon the sons of the Fatherland. Night after night finds them from home. Morning after morning sees them at the counting-house or the laboratory having known no rest. Under such stress a man's brain is bound to go, and he becomes irresponsible. Egomania seizes him. His judgment is unreliable. That, I believe, has happened to the Kaiser. I do not mean that he is addicted to vices such as I have indicated. Probably his life is as free from any sort of indulgence of a lascivious nature as any man in his dominions. But he is the victim of that restlessness which in some

respects is worse than healthy indulgence. He passes through life at the speed of an express train. Now he is reading his letters with his Chancellor, while yet it is dark. Now, at the dawn, he is reviewing his troops. A few hours more finds him a hundred miles from the capital. But he is back at one in the morning, and all the servants are at attention as, with an immensity of fuss, the War-Lord enters his palace—to be aroused again before dawn and to go through a programme as arduous and distracted. What time for contemplation, what opportunity for reflection has such a man? William the Sudden has none. The end of the Hohenzollern tyranny has come to this: that the sovereign has no more leisure than those wretched secretaries of poor Frederick on whose condition I have touched.

So much, then, for the dominant traits that mark this strange personality. But they do not exhaust its possibilities. There is no doubt that madness has dogged the footsteps of the Hohenzollern. That Fat William and Frederick the Great were sane, normal men, no one will assert. Frederick William III., the mystic voluptuary, was within an ace of actual madness. His son, the moody ascetic, was weak-minded to a



degree, while, as we have seen, the grand-uncle of the present Kaiser was so hopelessly insane that he had to be confined in an asylum.

Now, it is in connection with the undoubted insanity of this particular Hohenzollern that a point of exceptional interest arises in connection with the present occupant of the throne of Germany.

Frederick William IV., the mad king, married, but died childless. A daughter of his brother William, however, Princess Marie, married Maximilian II., King of Bavaria. She had two sons, Ludwig II., King of Bavaria, and the present King Otto—both insane.

Now, it is suggested that this insanity was inherited by both victims, not from the mother's family, who, it is claimed, are quite free from the taint, but from the Hohenzollern, the suggestion being, of course, that not only was Frederick William IV. insane, but that his brother also was afflicted; and there is, strange to say, some evidence at least which supports this theory, for if we contrast the Kaiser with King Otto of Bavaria we shall find a surface resemblance between the two men that is very startling.

Let us take one at random. King Otto had a marked dislike of the presence of

servants. He insisted that they should enter his presence only after the most profound obeisance, and then at the very rarest intervals. The unhappy man cherished the delusion that the sound of his voice was too good for the menials whom he loved to debase. He used to write his orders on pieces of paper that were pushed underneath the door, to be picked up by the attendants outside. If that were impossible, then they were made to enter the room in grovelling attitudes, and if they could be got to attempt a realistic enactment of a dog, all the better. The King was highly gratified. If not, then an orgie of servant-beating followed. Some domestics would be quite suddenly discharged, for no offence that could be surmised, and if not discharged they were banished to some remote shooting-box or far-off castle, there to receive inferior wages and to feel the weight of the royal displeasure without being able faintly to conjecture the reason.

Now while it is obvious that nothing parallel to this occurs in the life of His Most Supreme Highness the Kaiser, there is a resemblance to some of the more pronounced symptoms that is not a little disquieting. It seems to be quite clearly

established that the Kaiser will have no servants inside his apartments, save when he is graciously pleased to be asleep. The palace regulations insist on this with great clearness. What is the result? If the servants are dusting the furniture in the royal sitting-room, blacking the royal grate, or cleaning the royal windows—necessary tasks that must be discharged every day—and if His Majesty choose to arouse him from his slumbers and to pass through the room, a wild scamper ensues, and the domestics, who have only been doing their duty, fly like criminals before the wrath to come. Yet if their task is not completed, if the royal sitting-room is not tidied, or the royal writing-room is askew, then woe betide them! The work must be done, true enough, but the servants have to sneak about it in a furtive, frightened manner, much as if they were going to engage in petty thefts, and because it is a rule of the house that their master's eye shall not be displeased by the sight of so ungodly a thing as one of his servants—those servants whom, we are told, never hear the courtesy of a civil greeting from their master's lips, much less to be addressed by name. It is no exaggeration to say that unless the accounts of the Kaiser's

household have been grossly exaggerated his domestics enjoy a status very little removed from that of slaves !

This morbid and unmanly exaltation of himself is not the only flaw which one can detect in a mind naturally vigorous and acute, but, as one fears, warped and poisoned to a degree.

One of the commonest forms of insanity, one of its surest indications, is an inordinate love of display that finds its vent in lavish entertainment, in gaudy ostentation, in constant posturing and persistent efforts to gain attention. Now, there can be no question that the Kaiser has this love of "showing off" to an extent that is astonishing. The Kaiser is fond of telling all and sundry that he inherits the genius of the great Frederick, and he has clearly modelled his policy, his speeches, even his habits of life, on that of the greatest of the Hohenzollern. But so strong in him is the desire to attract attention that he has departed violently in one most salient matter from the Frederician tradition. The victor of Rosbach wore throughout his life practically but one suit—a sombre, almost threadbare, uniform. The Kaiser, who has never commanded his army through one single battle, has not one but nearly

three hundred uniforms—uniforms into which he is for ever changing, for ever taking off and putting on, and in which he is for ever being photographed. He has been photographed in almost every conceivable posture, in every conceivable dress, and those who know him state that he is never happier than when adding another pose to his repertoire. But his love of the limelight does not end here. On every topic that comes before his subjects, on almost every question that our present generation has to discuss, he has an opinion to give, and has given it stridently, blatantly, and with an imperious attempt at finality that demands attention.

The Kaiser's grand-uncle was a speaker of great eloquence and real power, and nothing could restrain his passion for delivering orations on the slightest provocation. The Kaiser has that passion, too. They say he is never happier than when he is proclaiming his views and opinions to the respectful multitude. Sometimes he speaks with real power and insight. Sometimes he talks cheap theatricalities. All of his speeches have the same unmistakable mark of having been delivered for the love of effect, for the pleasure of focussing attention on himself, of having his remarks talked about, of know-

ing that his personality is again to the fore. They are marked also by another quality—a quality that is unmistakably insane. The speeches are full to overflowing of assumptions of authority that are at once tiresome and ridiculous ; of crude, bombastic threats ; of hints of powers that are almost supernatural ; and of decisions that the speaker obviously considers epoch-making, and against which no appeal is possible. He is for ever ascending the judgment-seat and for ever delivering judgment, supremely conscious of his ability to pronounce the last word ; supremely satisfied that he, and he alone, can sum up on the question—it does not matter what the question is : literary, musical, artistic, scientific political—the great “ Sir Oracle ” has laid down the law on all of them. From the making of jam, to the proper performance of Wagner, from the influence of sea-power on history, to the correct way of describing dishes in a menu, the Kaiser has done it all to his own supreme satisfaction, and has achieved the very liveliest happiness in the doing thereof. If one thing is more certain about him than another, it is that he is only really and thoroughly enjoying himself when he is causing people to talk about him ; when, in a word, he is gratifying that love of display which marks the unsound mind.



Then, again, consider the imperious egomania that distinguishes the man in small things as in great. His Imperial Majesty, it may not be generally known, decides for the ladies of his household what dresses they are to wear on the festive occasions of his court. Dress has, in all its details, a wonderful fascination for this inspired autocrat. Yet, even so, one would have thought that he might have left such details as the corsage of his wife, and of those of her maids of honour, to be settled by themselves. But, after all, perhaps, we ought not to be surprised. Like the children of his Guard, they belong to him—"body and soul," to quote his own chaste and elegant phraseology, and, that being so, it is not surprising that he should insist on selecting for them the gowns they are to wear! As with the ladies of the court, so with his officers. Woe betide an officer who, before the war, donned a coat one inch shorter than the regulations demanded, or appeared in trousers that did not conform to the regimental pattern—a pattern that the Kaiser decides and approves, just as he decides all the thousand and one details that go to the accoutrement of his army.

The rules, regulations, and orders that



have been issued on this point at the behest of the emperor—regulations covering points so trivial that they are not worth thinking of—would constitute a bulky volume. The Kaiser's mind, we may see from this circumstance alone, is destined to know no peace, no rest. When it is not busy with high affairs of state, then it must concern itself with buttons and tunics. He has but to order, let us remember, to have his requirements carried out, so that the egomania from which he suffers feeds on its own manifestation. And with the gratification of this passion for intermeddling there has followed a complete loss of any sense of proportion. It is stated that when Germany was in the throes of a serious political crisis of really national importance, the Kaiser was occupied in altering the plans for the disposal of the sewage of some provincial town so that the chief bathing establishment thereof might not be incommoded! They say he spent hours in revising the survey and remodeling the plans the while Germany's national questions rested on the shelf. That is only one case out of many. When the Kaiser should have been giving his attention to grave affairs of state he has been considering uniforms, or writing operas, or laying

down plans for new churches, or orchestrating some new piece of music. And mark, let any paper in Germany dare to hint that even His Imperial and Most Supreme Highness has failed in any of these tasks—why, then, a prosecution for *lèse majesté* follows. Not long ago a music teacher dared to criticise the Kaiser's opera, the "Song to Ægir." She described it, somewhat rudely perhaps, as a piece of rubbish, and she went to prison for three months. This sentence does not stand alone. According to the author of the "Secret History of the Court of Berlin," \* sentences aggregating 311 years were imposed on people who refused to take His Majesty's compositions seriously, and who were so impolite as to say so. One editor, who reported that the Kaiser and his suite had spent a whole day running after an old sow (they were, in fact, pig-sticking) was incarcerated for nine months! Other sentences for *lèse majesté* have been for offences as trivial. The Kaiser, had he a sense of humour, would smile at them, shrug his shoulders, and proceed with the day's work. But humour is the one thing that Germany and the Hohenzollern have never captured. Perhaps had the Kaiser a sense of the ridiculous, had he been able to

\* John Long.

laugh at his own foibles, to smile at his own antics, he would have been a sane and normal man. Even the hectic whirl in which his days have been passed would not have so deranged that restless mind, with its imperious will, its vainglorious egomania, its supreme and limitless conceit.

For over and above all the insanity that the Kaiser betrays, much of which is peculiar to himself, is the real hereditary madness of his race. I am not speaking now of the derangement of his great uncle, or of the mental infirmities that one may see cracking through the moulds of the minds of his predecessors. The root insanity of the family lies deeper than this, and, alas! it has bitten, not only all the members of the dynasty, but it has poisoned and perverted the mind of the German nation.

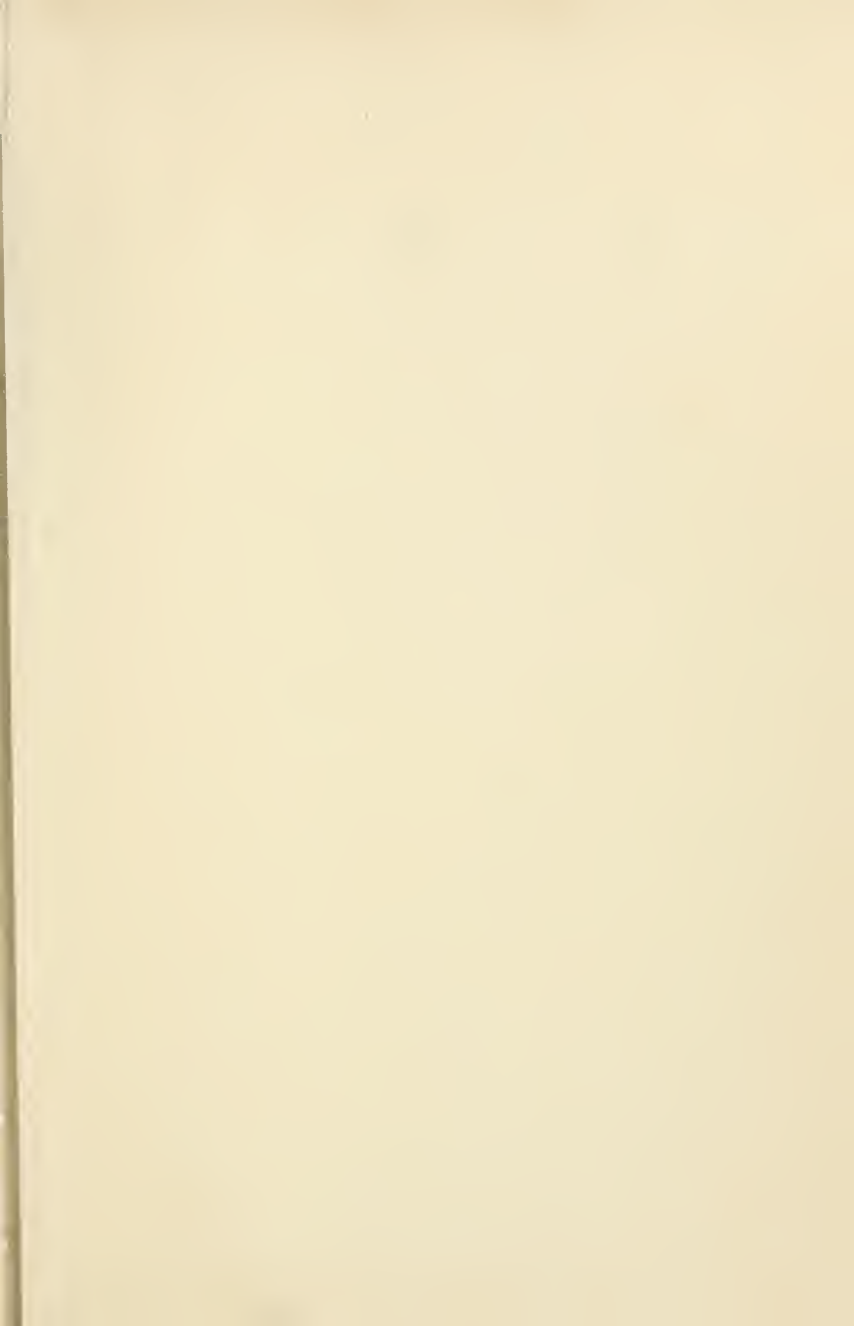
The commonest form of lunacy—as any alienist will tell you—is the belief in the possession of a supernormal power. Put simply, in its crudest form, the poor madman believes that he is God. You will find dozens of men so afflicted in every madhouse in the country. But if the mind be just a shade too subtle for a delusion so gross and palpable, it appears in a form slightly modified but just as dangerous. The patient is not God, but is His

pecially inspired agent, armed with special powers, and, of course, released from the ordinary obligations that press on common men. That is the hereditary delusion that has marked the Hohenzollern throughout their history, descending from generation to generation, and from father to son. The Hohenzollern took their crown from God's Altar, and to no one but the Almighty are they responsible. Frederick the Great, though a free-thinker with no belief in God, yet held the delusion, for he thought he and his kind responsible to no one. The Kaiser—who can doubt it?—has felt the legend in every breath he draws, in every tingle of his body. Unless we realise that, then his pretensions, his boasts, his speeches, his wild and whirling speeches, his sudden, eruptive, irresponsible acts—all are unintelligible, so unintelligible that even the hypothesis of madness leaves us still puzzling over them. But with that key in our hand, the psychology of the Kaiser seems startlingly clear. He, “the Anointed of the Lord,” must not be mocked, for he can do no wrong! The whole struggle of the Hohenzollern has been based on that delusion: that they were not as other men; that they had but to be true to their own instincts to succeed. The

strength of the delusion raised them from obscurity to greatness. They stamped their impress first on Prussia, then on Germany, till at last they had overshadowed Europe, and the "master morality" of Nietzsche confronted the soul of man, telling him that the strong were to be immune, that the weak had no rights, that only those who drank deep of this doctrine should inherit the earth. That was the madness, I say, that has inspired the Hohenzollern, and that has led on the Kaiser till he arrayed a world in arms against him. And that is the madness which now, at last, will prove their destruction also.

FINIS.

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